

Shooting puts pressure on Florida lawmakers to act

PARKLAND, Fla. (AP) — The deadly shooting at a Florida high school has put pressure on the state’s Republican-controlled Legislature to consider a sweeping package of gun-control laws in a state that has resisted restrictions on firearms for decades, lawmakers said Monday.

The legislative effort coalesced as 100 students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School prepared to ride buses more than 400 miles to the state capital Tuesday to urge lawmakers to act to prevent a repeat of the massacre that killed 17 students and faculty last week.

The suspect, 19-year-old former student Nikolas Cruz, made his first appearance in court Monday. Wearing a prison jumpsuit, he kept his head down and didn’t appear to make eye contact with the

judge or others in the courtroom, though he responded briefly to someone on the defense team. A previous appearance was by a video connection from jail.

His lawyers have said he will plead guilty if prosecutors agree not to pursue the death penalty. No decision has been made on that.

Soon after the shooting, several legislative leaders were taken on a tour of the school to see the damage firsthand and appeared shaken afterward.

The attack seemed to overcome the resistance of some in the state’s leadership, which has rebuffed gun restrictions since Republicans took control of both the governor’s office and the Legislature in 1999. However, there is still strong resistance by many in the party to any gun-control

measures, leaving the fate of new restrictions unclear.

Sen. Bill Galvano, a Republican and the incoming state Senate president, said the Senate was preparing a package that would include raising the age to purchase any firearm to 21, creating a waiting period for purchasing any type of firearm, banning bump stocks that can allow semi-automatic guns to spray bullets quickly and creating gun-violence restraining orders.

Authorities said Cruz had a string of run-ins with school authorities that ended with his expulsion. Police were also repeatedly called to his house throughout his childhood. Cruz’s lawyers said there were repeated warning signs that he was mentally unstable and potentially violent. Yet he legally purchased a semi-automatic rifle.

Ex-workers at Russian ‘troll factory’ trust indictment

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia — While Russian officials scoff at a U.S. indictment charging 13 Russians with meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, several people who worked at the same St. Petersburg “troll factory” say they think the criminal charges are well-founded.

Marat Mindiyarov, a former commenter at the innocuously named Internet Research Agency, says the organization’s Facebook department hired people with excellent English skills to sway U.S. public opinion through an elaborate social media campaign.

His own experience at the agency makes him trust the U.S. indictment, Mindiyarov told The Associated Press. “I believe that that’s how it was and that it was them,” he said.

The federal indictment issued Friday names a businessman linked to President Vladimir Putin and a dozen other Russians. It alleges that Yevgeny Prigozhin — a wealthy restaurateur dubbed “Putin’s chef,” paid for the internet operation that created fictitious social media accounts and used them to spread tendentious messages.

The aim of the factory’s work was either to influence voters or to undermine their faith in the U.S. political system, the 37-page indictment states.

Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Monday that while the indictment focuses on “Russian nationals,” it gives “no indication that the Russian government was involved in this in any way.” Peskov reasserted that Moscow did not interfere in the U.S. election.

Mindiyarov said he failed the



A security guard speaks on the phone outside the Concord Catering office in St. Petersburg, Russia, Sunday, Feb. 18.

language exam needed to get a job on the Internet Research Agency’s Facebook desk, where the pay was double than the domestic side of the factory. The sleek operation produced content that looked as if it were written by native English speakers, he said.

“These were people with excellent language skills, interpreters, university graduates,” he said. “It’s very hard to tell it’s a foreigner writing because they master the language wonderfully.”

The English test he took asked for a writing sample about Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton’s

chances of winning the U.S. presidential vote, Mindiyarov recalled.

“I wrote that her chances were high and she could become the first female president,” he told the AP.

Mindiyarov said he took a job at the troll factory in late 2014 because he was unemployed and curious. At the time, about 400 people occupied four floors of an office building and worked 12-hour shifts, he said. Most of the operation focused on the separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine and Western sanctions against Russia, not political races in the West, he said.

The factory had video and photo

departments, Mindiyarov said. The trolls received their wages in cash and operated in teams as they tried to foment public interest with fake discussions, he said.

“We worked in a group of three where one played the part of a scoundrel, the other one was a hero, and the third one kept a neutral position,” he said. “For instance, one could write that Putin was bad, the other one would say it was not so, and the third would confirm the position of the second while inserting some picture.”

After only a couple of months, Mindiyarov quit. He said he hated the work.

MOTORBIKE: Different audience needed

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50 bikers went to the hill climb and a few dozen to the motorcycle race.

He attributed the lack of interest from Pendleton Bike Week attendees to a shift in biker culture: today’s bikers are more likely to be white collar workers interested in drinking and listening to music when off their motorcycle rather than watching another motorcycle event.

Dillon said it wasn’t intended as a criticism of bikers, but he needed to make some changes to keep the events viable.

He axed Thunder in the Blues — the Round-Up doesn’t allow any events in the arena after Aug. 1 — and moved Nitro in the Blues back a week to give it more breathing room.

Blue collar workers are a more natural constituency for Nitro in the Blues, Dillon said, and locals from Umatilla County, Tri-Cities and Walla Walla could help meet his attendance goal of 5,000 for this year.

By moving the hill climb to August, Dillon said Nitro in the Blues fills a dead spot in the calendar between Pendleton Bike Week and Pendleton Whisky Music Fest in July and Round-Up in September.

There is evidence that a hill climb event can draw



Joe Kopp of Mica, Washington leads the pack coming into the fourth turn of the eighth heat of the 2017 Thunder in the Blues flat track racing at the Pendleton Round-Up Grounds.

regional crowds.

Dillon said the Big Nasty Hill Climb in Payette, Idaho — a town just across the border from Ontario — has attracted as many as 13,000 people.

Possible new event for 2019

While there might be one less off-season event at the Round-Up grounds in 2018, the Round-Up Association is already looking at bringing in a new event for 2019.

Although nothing is final,

Round-Up parades director Randy Leonard said the association is in the process of recruiting the Pacific Overland Auction, a McMinnville horse-drawn vehicle and farm equipment auction that advertises itself as the biggest auction of its kind west of the Mississippi River.

The proceeds from sales of the carriages and wagons goes to the Anvil Academy, a Newberg trade school for at-risk youth that’s a “classroom disguised as a wagon

factory” according to the academy’s website.

Leonard said the academy is looking to move the auction outside of the Yamhill County Fairgrounds and is dedicated to preserving Western heritage through the things it produces.

“It would be a perfect fit,” he said.

Leonard said the Round-Up should know about the academy’s decision by the next auction, which is scheduled from April 27-28.

BURGLARY: Arce asked for speedy trial

Continued from 1A

the court to delay sentencing. Nelson said that helps the defense and prosecutors make sentencing recommendations to the court. Nelson said Arce’s move had attorneys scurrying to make sure the sentence was accurate because the unlawful use of a weapon charge had to run concurrent with the robbery while the other charges were consecutive.

The prison sentence added up to 12 years and

eight months.

After sentencing, Nelson said, the case took another odd turn when Arce asked to talk to Devin and Smith. Devin faced charges similar to Arce’s, while Smith faced first- and second-degree burglary, vehicle theft and first-degree theft.

Devin then pleaded no contest to second-degree robbery, first- and second-degree burglary and vehicle theft in exchange for a sentence of more than four

years, according to court records. Nelson said drug addiction played a significant role in her life, and now she can get treatment.

Smith pleaded guilty to first-degree burglary and first-degree theft and took a prison term of 19 months. Nelson said she and Devin can qualify for time off for good behavior and for alternative incarceration, such as house arrest, if they meet certain criteria.

Arce cannot qualify for

those incentives for the robbery, but he can try to shave time from the rest of his sentence.

The trio remain in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton. Nelson said they will transfer together to Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, Wilsonville, the state’s intake center for new prisoners.

Nelson said at the end, he heard one utter: “We came in together, we should go out together.”

TAX: Bill simplified

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D-Beaverton, the chair of the Senate Finance and Revenue Committee, has previously said that the Opportunity Grant tax credit provision provides some relief to the state’s higher-income taxpayers, who typically itemize their deductions rather than taking the standard deduction.

Those taxpayers have been hit by limits in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act beginning in 2018 on how much of their state and local taxes they may deduct from their federal taxable income. Using this tax credit mechanism could also support qualifying college students, who have seen tuition prices climb in recent years.

Although an earlier version of the bill was approved by the Senate Finance and Revenue Committee and was sent to the Senate Floor last week, it did not go up for a vote. Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, sent the bill back to committee.

Hass said Monday that the newest amendment is an effort to simplify the bill in response to “general” dissatisfaction” with the original proposal.

“It just got too complicated,” Hass said.

Small business groups and Republicans voiced opposition to that earlier version, as did the governor.

On Friday, shortly after the public release of the quarterly revenue forecast, Democratic Gov. Kate Brown said she had “concerns” about the bill and didn’t support that version.

“I believe we must protect small businesses, the engine of our economic growth, and not add state spending that increases our budget deficit in the long term,” Brown said.

However, the Governor’s Office has not provided specific criticisms of the bill.

“The Trump Administration pushed a new tax

policy that largely benefits the wealthy very quickly through Congress and the effects on Oregon are yet to be fully known,” a spokesman for Brown said in an email Monday. “The governor wants to make sure that any changes to Oregon’s tax policy does the opposite and benefits our small businesses and encourages entrepreneurship.”

Senate Republicans, meanwhile, blasted the amendment to the bill late Monday, claiming it would “burden” business owners with \$1.3 billion in taxes over the next six years.

“This measure appears to be designed by Democrats to hurt Main Street mom-and-pop shops, start-ups and young entrepreneurs, and favor big corporations,” said Sen. Herman Baertschiger, Jr., R-Grants Pass, a member of the Senate Finance and Revenue Committee.

Some lawmakers are worried about the state’s financial cushion since state economists said last week that it’s slightly more likely that Oregon’s booming economy could encounter a downturn.

Eliminating the pass-through deduction on the state level could help the state boost that safety net, which is available in the event of a slowdown that isn’t severe enough for the state to access its Rainy Day Fund.

Hass maintained Monday that the bill would make up revenue lost to federal tax reform to pay for important state services.

“If anybody came into this short session proposing a \$200 million a year tax break for a group of individuals, they wouldn’t get anywhere,” Hass said. “So the federal government is essentially doing the same thing. We’re not going to shrug our shoulders and say, ‘That’s OK, we can cut schools or cut corrections or state police.’ We have to respond.”