

Lawmakers left hanging on gun laws

By CATHERINE LUCEY
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In his quest to tackle gun violence, President Donald Trump has ricocheted between calling for tougher laws and declaring his fealty to the Second Amendment’s right to bear arms, leaving a trail of befuddled lawmakers and advocates in his wake.

One thing he still has not done: clearly outline his legislative priorities.

Washington’s week closed Friday without further explanation from the president, the White House indicating that for now, at least, he is backing an incremental proposal on background checks and a bill that would provide new federal dollars to stem school violence.

Just what Trump would like to see in the “beautiful” and “comprehensive” bill he called for earlier in the week remained unclear. That comment came at a bipartisan meeting with lawmakers Wednesday, which was quickly followed by a private session with the National Rifle Association on Thursday.

“Good (Great) meeting in the Oval Office tonight with the NRA!” Trump tweeted Thursday night.

He had outlined some of his preferences via Twitter earlier Thursday, saying that both good and bad ideas had come out of the bipartisan meeting. He said: “Background Checks a big part of conversation. Gun free zones are proven targets of killers. After many years, a Bill should emerge. Respect 2nd Amendment!”

Amid the confusion, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has shelved the gun debate for now, saying the Senate will turn next week to other measures.

Disagreement continues among legislators over the appropriate response after the Florida school shooting that left 17 dead. Republi-



AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., flanked by Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., left, and Senate Majority Whip John Cornyn, R-Texas, speaks with reporters Tuesday following weekly policy luncheons where they discussed school safety measures in response to the Parkland, Fla., assault that left 17 dead, at the Capitol in Washington.

“The White House is going to bob and weave on guns. Accept it.”

— **Chris Murphy**, U.S. Senator, Connecticut

cans have largely backed away from stricter gun limits, while Democrats emboldened by Trump’s rhetoric are pushing for ambitious action, including expanded background checks and even a politically risky ban on assault weapons.

As is often the case, the president has been an unreliable negotiator.

Sen. Chris Murphy, a Connecticut Democrat who is a leading advocate of tougher gun laws, predicted on Twitter: “The White House is going to bob and weave on guns. Accept it.”

Still, he added, “Trump’s instinct on this issue is not wrong — if his party doesn’t get behind background checks soon, they’re cooked in 2018 and 2020.” And he argued that Trump’s “willingness to buck the gun lobby in public, rule out the NRA agenda and talk up background checks, has

changed this debate nationally.”

White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Friday that Trump supports a limited proposal from Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, and Murphy that would boost participation in the existing federal background check program, as well as a bill that would provide new federal grant funding to stem school violence.

Sanders said Trump had not signed on to a more sweeping background check bill that would require the review of firearm purchases online and at gun shows. The measure, from Sens. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., and Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., has found new momentum since it was first introduced after the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut that left 20 children dead.

Sanders sought to clarify Trump’s comments earlier in the week expressing support for tougher background checks and interest in raising the minimum age to buy certain weapons. She said he was interested in improving background checks, but “not necessarily universal background checks.” And she said that while Trump “conceptually” supports higher age requirements to purchase certain weapons, “he also knows there’s not a lot of broad support for that.”

The president also wants to use an executive order to bar the use of bump-stock devices that enable guns to fire like automatic weapons.

After Republican anxiety about Trump’s comments seeming to express openness to tougher gun controls, the executive director of the NRA, Chris Cox, was positive about their Thursday night meeting. He tweeted that Trump and Vice President Mike Pence “support the Second Amendment, support strong due process and don’t want gun control.”

BRIEFLY

NATO rejects Putin’s ‘unacceptable’ threats to target allies

BRUSSELS (AP) — NATO says Russian President Vladimir Putin’s threat to target its members are unacceptable and that the military alliance will continue using its armed forces to deter aggression.

NATO spokeswoman Oana Lungescu said Friday that “Russian statements threatening to target allies are unacceptable and counterproductive.”

Putin said Thursday that Moscow has tested an array of new strategic nuclear weapons that can’t be intercepted, telling the West: “You have failed to contain Russia.”

Lungescu said NATO’s missile defense system is built to respond to attacks from outside Europe and North America and not directed against Russia.

Noting Russia’s “aggressive actions” in Ukraine and military buildup around Europe, she said: “NATO is pursuing a twin-track approach to Russia: strong deterrence and defense, combined with meaningful dialogue.”

Polish official: Germany owes Poland \$850 billion for WWII

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — A Polish official said Friday that Germany could owe his country \$850 billion for the damage it inflicted during World War II.

Arkadiusz Mularczyk is leading a team in the parliament that is assessing potential reparations to Poland. Germany killed 6 million Polish citizens and caused great material losses during its nearly six-year occupation of Poland.

“We are talking about very large, but justified amounts of compensation for war crimes, for destroyed cities, villages and the lost demographic potential of our country,” Mularczyk said on Polsat News, a private broadcaster.

Last year, Poland’s ruling conservative nationalist Law and Justice party said the nation deserves compensation for its losses and set up a team of lawmakers under Mularczyk’s leadership to estimate how much is due.

To date, Poland has not made an official demand. Germany has repeatedly said there is no legal basis for Poland’s reparation claims because the matter was settled in a 1953 agreement. Poland’s current authorities have argued the 1953 decision is invalid because it was dictated by Moscow when Poland was a satellite of the Soviet Union.

Bitcoin heist: 600 powerful computers stolen in Iceland

REYKJAVIK, Iceland (AP) — Some 600 computers used to “mine” bitcoin and other virtual currencies have been stolen from data centers in Iceland in what police say is the biggest series of thefts ever in the North Atlantic island nation.

Some 11 people were arrested, including a security guard, in what Icelandic media have dubbed the “Big Bitcoin Heist.” A judge at the Reykjanes District Court on Friday ordered two people to remain in custody.

The powerful computers, which have not yet been found, are worth almost \$2 million. But if the stolen equipment is used for its original purpose — to create new bitcoins — the thieves could turn a massive profit in an untraceable currency without ever selling the items.

POTHOLE: Road status means neighbors can create a local improvement district

Continued from 1A

He said property owners along the road have been “in limbo” for months as they have worked to determine the legal classification of the road and what can be done about it.

In December, several residents appeared before the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners to ask the county to assist in taking care of the potholes, which are so large cars frequently move into the oncoming lane or partway off the road to avoid them. Residents claimed that the county had done minor maintenance on the road in years past and asked why this instance was different.

County counsel Doug Olsen told them the road wasn’t a county road but rather a local access road.

Oregon State Statute 368.031 states that a local access road is open to the public and “subject to the exercise of jurisdiction by

a county governing body in the same manner as a county road” and yet “a county and its officers, employees or agents are not liable for failure to improve the local access road or keep it in repair.” The county is also not legally allowed to spend money on the road except in cases of emergency or when “public use justifies” the project and the county passes a resolution.

Residents feel that the level of public use on the road justifies some sort of assistance from the government, even if property owners do need to shoulder some of the burden.

“It started as a little service road to two houses,” Scott Purswell said. “Obviously things have changed.”

Purswell said vehicles have left behind bumpers, headlights and other parts as they took the road too fast and hit the massive potholes. Other people swerve off the road, which Purswell said leads him to worry that a

neighbor checking their mail will get clipped by a car.

“You can see tire tracks a foot from our fences now,” he said.

Purswell said the nine neighbors have gotten a few bids, which have ranged from \$25,000 to just fill in the potholes to more than three times that for resurfacing work along the crumbling road.

County commissioner Larry Givens said after the December meeting the county did some further research and determined it was mostly a public access road with a very small private piece. He said the road department’s survey crew has been working to determine how much frontage each property possessed on the road. If the property owners form a local improvement district to resurface the road they will be assessed according to frontage feet.

While neighbors can handle improvements to local access roads and

privately-owned roads all on their own if they choose, a local improvement district provides a way for them to pay over time instead of providing all the cash upfront. If more than 60 percent of the neighbors petition a county to form an LID, the county can handle design and construction on behalf of the property owners and then send them a bill with financing options after the work is complete.

Givens said an “emergency” on a local access road would be if it were determined that it wasn’t passable for emergency vehicles. He said while the county understands the issue on East McKinney Avenue they have just under 1,800 miles of roads in the county and not enough money to do everything needed on them.

He said a very small portion of McKinney Avenue is actually a completely private road instead of a local access road. In other places

that type of situation has caused problems — Givens remembers a legal battle near Milton-Freewater about Hurst Lane, which was mostly a local access road with one private section. The owner of the private section blocked it off to through traffic, causing problems for other neighbors, who sued for access.

He said the patchwork of county roads, local access roads, private roads and roads under a different government’s jurisdiction can be confusing sometimes for county residents.

“It does come up once in a while where people thing this is a county road and the county should be taking care of it and find out this is a public access road or a private road,” he said.

Sometimes in those situations not all neighbors want to improve the road, due to cost and the fact that giant holes in a road tend to cut down on traffic and speed — a factor McKinney

Avenue neighbors say has been mentioned. On the other hand, a road that’s falling apart in such a noticeable way also reduces property values and creates extra wear and tear on vehicles.

Givens suggested county residents who want improvements to the road in their neighborhood check with the county’s road department first to find out the road’s classification, which will determine if the road is the county’s responsibility, if it is the neighbors’ responsibility but with a public right of way, or if it is a completely private road with which property owners can do what they wish.

Purswell said neighbors have been told that a local improvement district might not even be possible due to the road’s “patchwork” of designations and history so they are still working out what to do.

“Everyone keeps praying at night that we can meet halfway,” he said.

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