

# Trump backs off call for raising minimum age to buy gun

## Reiterates plan to strengthen background checks

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House on Sunday pledged to help states pay for firearms training for teachers and reiterated its call to improve the background check system as part of a new plan to prevent school shootings.

But in a move sure to please the gun lobby, the plan does not include a push to increase the minimum age for purchasing assault weapons to 21, which President Donald Trump had repeatedly championed.

Instead, a new federal commission on school safety will examine the age issue, as well as a long list of others topics, as part of a longer-term look at school safety and violence.

The plan forgoes an endorsement of comprehensive background checks for gun purchases, which the president, at times, seemed to embrace.

In a call with reporters Sunday evening, administration officials described the plan as a fulfillment of Trump's call for action in the wake of the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, last month that left 17 dead.

"Today we are announcing meaningful actions, steps that can be taken right away to help protect students," said Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, who will chair the commission.

DeVos said that "far too often, the focus" after such tragedies "has been only on the most contentious fights, the things that have divided people and sent them into their entrenched corners." She described the plan as "pragmatic."

The plan was immediately panned by gun advocates, including the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. "Americans expecting real leadership to prevent gun violence will be disappointed and troubled by President Trump's dangerous retreat from his promise," said Avery Gardiner, the



AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster

In this March 10 photo, President Donald Trump speaks at a campaign rally at Atlantic Aviation in Moon Township, Pa. Weeks after prodding lawmakers to stand up to the National Rifle Association, Trump is backing off his call for increasing the minimum age to buy an assault weapon — an idea strongly opposed by the NRA.

group's co-president.

Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa., called the plan "weak on security and an insult to the victims of gun violence." In a statement, he added, "When it comes to keeping our families safe, it's clear that President Trump and Congressional Republicans are all talk and no action."

The plan is less ambitious than the changes Trump advocated in a series of listening sessions in the weeks after the massacre. In televised meetings with lawmakers, survivors of recent school shootings and the families of victims, Trump made a strong case for arming teachers, but also increasing the age for purchasing long guns.

"I mean, so they buy a revolver — a handgun — they buy at the age of 21. And yet, these other weapons that we talk about ... they're allowed to buy them at 18. So how does that make sense?" told school officials

last month. "We're going to work on getting the age up to 21 instead of 18."

White House spokesman Raj Shah had said earlier Sunday in an interview with ABC's "This Week" that "the president has been clear that he does support raising the age to 21" and that that would be a "component" of the announcement.

But Trump has also spoken repeatedly in recent weeks with the heads of the powerful National Rifle Association, which considers increasing the age of purchase to be an assault on the Second Amendment. The NRA on Friday sued Florida over a new gun law signed by Republican Gov. Rick Scott that bans the purchase of firearms by anyone under the age of 21.

Instead, the issue will be one of a list of topics to be studied by the DeVos commission, which will then provide recommendations to the

president. Administration officials said they had not set a deadline for the commission's recommendations, but expected they'd made in under a year.

Trump's embrace of another commission appears at odds with comments he made Saturday night mocking their use, at least when it comes to fighting drug addiction.

During the meetings, Trump also advocated arming certain teachers and school staffers, arguing that gun-free schools are "like an invitation for these very sick people" to commit murder.

"If you had a teacher who was adept at firearms, they could end the attack very quickly," he has said.

As part plan, the White House has directed the Justice Department to help states partner with local law enforcement to provide "rigorous firearms training to specifically qualified volunteer school

personnel," said Andrew Bremberg, director of the president's Domestic Policy Council. The White House did not immediately say how much money would be made available.

Trump also called on states to pass temporary, court-issued Risk Protection Orders, which allow law enforcement to confiscate guns from individuals who pose risks to themselves and others, and temporarily prevent them from buying firearms. And he called for the reform and expansion of mental health programs, as well as a full audit and review of the FBI tip line. The bureau has been criticized for not following up on warnings about the suspect in the Parkland school shooting.

During the often free-wheeling conversations, Trump also seemed to voice support for "universal" background checks, which would apply to private gun sales and those at gun shows, instead of just from licensed dealers. He also raised eyebrows by suggesting that law enforcement officials should be able to confiscate guns from those they deem a safety risk even before a court has weighed in.

"Take the guns first, go through due process second," Trump said.

Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the White House press secretary, later walked back both suggestions, saying "Universal means something different to a lot of people." She said the president wanted to expedite the court process, not circumvent it.

Instead, the White House reiterated its support for improvements to the National Instant Criminal Background Check through the "Fix NICS" bill, which would penalize federal agencies that don't properly report required records and reward states that comply by providing them with federal grant preferences.

The White House called on Congress to pass a second bill that would create a federal grant program to train students, teachers and school officials how to identify signs of potential violence and intervene early.

# Bids to curb health care costs offer little more than talk

WASHINGTON (AP) — It started as a bipartisan attempt to curb soaring health care premiums.

But Congress' effort to stabilize the nation's insurance markets is faltering amid escalating demands by each party and erratic positions by President Donald Trump. Democrats want bigger federal subsidies for consumers under President Barack Obama's health care law while Republicans, still fighting that statute, aim to relax its requirements and win abortion restrictions.

The bickering could collapse the whole effort, with each side blaming the other when next year's expected higher insurance rates are announced — just weeks before Election Day, on Nov. 6.

Last week, Sen. Patty Murray of Washington, a



AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite, File

In this Feb. 6, file photo, dawn breaks over the Capitol in Washington.

lead Democratic negotiator, called GOP demands on abortion limitations "a complete nonstarter." A spokeswoman for Rep. Ryan Costello, R-Pa., sponsor of the House GOP package, said if Democrats want to oppose the effort "by playing

abortion politics, then shame on them."

Some Democrats think they'd reap political gains if the talks collapse since polls show the health care statute is widely popular and the public would largely fault Republicans if consumer

costs spiral skyward.

"Either Republicans help stabilize the market or they own these premium and deductible increases," said Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Ore. "And I'd be glad to help crucify them if they don't want to do something very reasonable."

The effort forces Republicans to choose between trying to avert bad news about premiums shortly before elections or standing by their opposition to anything that could be viewed as propping up "Obamacare."

Trump hasn't clarified things for his party. In a single day last October, he bounced from praising one plan as "a very good solution" to labeling it "bailouts to insurance companies."

Signs indicate insurance prices will likely continue upward. So try containing

those increases, lawmakers crafted two bipartisan bills last year.

One by Sens. Susan Collins, R-Maine, and Bill Nelson, D-Fla., would provide billions to states for reinsurance. The funds would help insurers afford covering some of the sickest, costliest customers.

Another by Murray and Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., would revive federal payments to carriers to subsidize discounts they give lower-earning consumers for costs like deductibles and copayments. Trump halted the subsidies as part of his effort to upend Obama's law after courts said Congress hadn't properly approved the money.

Providing ammunition for the sponsors, an analysis released Monday by Oliver Wyman Actuarial

Consulting, a private firm, estimated that if Congress enacted the proposals, premiums could be at least 40 percent lower than if no legislative action was taken.

Obama's statute requires insurers to provide those cost reductions, which last year cost the government \$7 billion to help around 6 million people.

In other changes since last fall, the new GOP tax law has erased the tax penalties enforcing the "Obamacare" individual mandate, which requires most people to buy coverage.

Trump has also proposed making it easier for insurers to sell policies that last less than a year and have fewer consumer protections than Obama's statute imposes, like required coverage for people with pre-existing conditions.

### BRIEFLY

#### Russia 'highly likely' behind ex-spy's poisoning

LONDON (AP) — Russia is "highly likely" to blame for poisoning a former spy and his daughter with a military-grade nerve agent, British Prime Minister Theresa May said Monday, demanding that Moscow give an explanation or face "extensive" retaliation.

May told lawmakers in a strongly worded statement that without a credible response from Russia by the end of Tuesday, Britain would consider the attack on Sergei Skripal and his daughter in a quiet English city "an unlawful use of force by the Russian state against the United Kingdom."

"There can be no question of business as usual with Russia," she said, without saying what measures Britain might take.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova dismissed May's allegations as a "circus show in the British Parliament."

Skripal, 66, and his 33-year-old daughter, Yulia, remain in critical condition after being found unconscious March 4 in Salisbury. A police detective who came in contact with them is in serious but stable condition.

May said British scientists have determined that Skripal and his daughter were poisoned with Novichok, a class of nerve agent developed by the Soviet Union near the end of the Cold War.

She said it was "highly likely" the substance came from Russia, and there were two possible explanations.

"Either this was a direct act by the Russian state against our country, or the Russian government lost control of this potentially catastrophically damaging nerve agent and allowed it to get into the hands of others," she said.

May said Britain had given the Russian ambassador in London a deadline of Tuesday to explain which version is true.

May has been under mounting pressure to hit Russia with sanctions, expulsions and other measures in response to the poisoning, the latest in a string of mysterious mishaps to befall Russians in Britain in recent years.

#### GOP report: No coordination between Trump and Russia

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans on the House Intelligence Committee have completed a draft report concluding there was no collusion or coordination between Donald Trump's presidential campaign and Russia, a finding that has enraged Democrats on the panel but is sure to please the White House.

After a yearlong investigation, Texas Rep. Mike Conaway announced Monday that the committee has finished interviewing witnesses and will share the report with Democrats for the first time on Tuesday. Conaway is the Republican leading the House probe, one of several investigations on Russian meddling in the 2016 elections.

Conaway previewed several of the report's conclusions.

"We found no evidence of collusion," Conaway told reporters Monday, suggesting that those who believe there was are reading too many spy novels. "We found perhaps some bad judgment, inappropriate meetings, inappropriate judgment in taking meetings. But only Tom Clancy or Vince Flynn or someone else like that could take this series of inadvertent contacts with each other, or meetings or whatever, and weave that into sort of a fiction page turner, spy thriller."

The public will not see the report until Democrats have reviewed it and the intelligence community has decided what information can become public, a process that could take weeks. Democrats are expected to issue a separate report with much different conclusions.

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OUR OPIOID CRISIS FEATURING: ERIC HOLEMAN AND DR. JOEL RICE

Jim Setzer, Umatilla County Public Health Director, will serve as moderator for the forum.

Eric Holeman obtained a Bachelor Of Science in Pharmacy from Oregon State University in 1986, and received his Doctor of Pharmacy degree and Hospital Residency from University of Washington/Harborview Medical Centers in 1988. Eric developed an interest in pain and opiate management in 1999 when he served as a hospice pain consultant and later in 2002, when he initiated a pharmacist managed pain service at Mid-Columbia Medical Center in The Dalles, Oregon. In 2012, he obtained certification through the American Academy of Pain Management as a credentialed pain provider.

Eric served as a member of the Clinical Advisory Panel to the Gorge Coordinated Care Organization from 2012-2016. He has been instrumental in leading a regional effort to develop strategic initiatives for chronic pain and opiate management throughout the Columbia Gorge and Central Oregon regions.

Eric has been employed at Mid-Columbia Medical Center since 2001, and currently serves in the capacity of Clinical Lead Pharmacist providing consultation related to cancer care, chronic pain, anti-coagulation and acute care management.

Dr. Joel Rice is Board Certified in General Psychiatry and Addiction Medicine, and started a small addiction clinic, Grande Ronde Recovery, in La Grande almost 20 years ago. Joel has been treating opioid use disorder with Suboxone and other medications in La Grande for 15 years, being the first in eastern Oregon to do so. Retired Pendleton Internist Dr. Dan Marier has the DEA Waiver to treat patients with Suboxone, and has just begun working with Joel.

Joel has been treating opioid use disorder in Pendleton for 3 years, in coordination with Umatilla County Human Services, and has plans to start seeing patients at their clinic in Hermiston soon. Joel currently has around 200 patients in Umatilla County with Opioid Use Disorder. He has established four "Sober Homes" in La Grande, where individuals with addiction can live in a supported, sober environment. They are working with Umatilla County Human Services to establish sober living residences in Pendleton and Hermiston.

Also in attendance will be Dr. Chuck Hofmann, Medical Director of New Directions Northwest addiction treatment center in Baker City, Mike Stensrud, the Eastern Oregon Prescription Drug Overdose Prevention Coordinator for Umatilla County Public Health, and Pendleton Police Chief, Stuart Roberts.

THE COST FOR THIS SERIES OF 4 FORUMS IS \$15 PER PERSON, \$25 PER COUPLE OR \$5 PER FORUM AT THE DOOR - STUDENTS ARE FREE

For more information about the EO Forum, please contact: Karen Parker at 541-966-3177.

The EO Forum is a collaborative effort among leaders from Blue Mountain Community College, InterMountain Education Service District, the East Oregonian, American Association of University Women, and Harriet Isom, a former United States ambassador who also serves on the committee. This EO Forum program is offered as part of Blue Mountain Community College's annual Arts and Culture Festival. For more information on the festival go to [www.bluecc.edu](http://www.bluecc.edu).