

Trump says he wants background checks, also reassures NRA

President says leaders are having 'serious discussions' about background checks

By ZEKE MILLER AND DEB RIECHMANN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Friday he believes he has influence to rally Republicans around stronger federal background check laws as Congress and the White House work on a response to last weekend's mass shootings in Texas and Ohio.

At the same time, Trump said he had assured the National Rifle Association that its gun-rights views would be "fully represented and respected." He said he was hopeful the NRA would not be an obstacle to strengthening the nation's gun laws.

Trump has promised to lead on tougher gun control measures before, including after the 2018 Parkland, Florida, school shooting, but little has come of it. His comments in the wake of the twin massacres marked his most optimistic and supportive words in favor of more stringent gun laws, though he left the details vague and it remained to be seen how much political capital Trump would throw behind marshaling Republicans on the issue.

He said Friday he now is looking for "very meaningful background checks" but is not considering a resurrection of an assault weapons ban. He said he also believes lawmakers will support "red flag" laws that allow guns to be removed from those who may be a danger to themselves and others.

"I see a better feeling right now toward getting something meaningful done," Trump told reporters



AP Photo/Evan Vucci

President Donald Trump talks to reporters on the South Lawn of the White House on Friday in Washington, as he prepares to leave Washington for his annual August holiday at his New Jersey golf club.

when asked why the political environment was different now.

"I have a greater influence now over the Senate and the House," he said at the White House.

Democrats and others have been skeptical of Trump's commitment to genuine gun control, judging from past experience. But he said he was behind it.

"The Republicans are going to be great and lead the charge along with the Democrats," he declared, saying he'd spoken with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell whom he proclaimed to be "totally onboard."

But McConnell, thus far, has only committed to a discussion of the issue. Republicans have long opposed expanding background checks — a bill passed by the Democratic-led House

is stalled in McConnell's Senate — but they face new pressure after the shootings in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, that left 31 people dead.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer tweeted in response Friday that McConnell must bring up the House-passed legislation, which Trump had previously threatened to veto. "To get anything meaningful done to address gun violence, we need his commitment to hold a Senate vote on the House-passed background checks legislation," Schumer said.

As for the NRA, which has contributed millions to help Trump and other Republicans, the gun lobby's chief executive, Wayne LaPierre, said this week that some federal gun control proposals "would make millions of law-abiding Americans less safe and less able to

defend themselves and their loved ones."

But Trump said he'd spoken with LaPierre this week and "I think in the end, Wayne and the NRA will either be there or either be a little more neutral."

"Frankly, I really think they're going to get there also," he added.

On Thursday, McConnell said he now wants background checks and other action, setting up a potentially pivotal moment when lawmakers return in the fall.

The Republican leader won't be calling senators back to work early, as some are demanding. But he told a Kentucky radio station that Trump called him Thursday morning and they talked about several ideas. The president, he said, is "anxious to get an outcome and so am I."

"What we can't do is fail

to pass something," McConnell said.

Traveling with Trump to New York, South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham said he intended to discuss the issue with the president over the weekend. He said he's in favor of a state-run list system that would prohibit certain people from buying guns.

"I just think the space to do nothing is gone," he said. "And that's a good thing."

McConnell said he and Trump discussed background checks and "red flag" laws. "Those are two items that for sure will be front and center as we see what we can come together on and pass," McConnell told Louisville's WHAS-AM.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Schumer said Trump assured them in phone calls Thursday he will review the House-passed bill

that would expand federal background checks for firearm sales.

In a joint statement, they said Trump called them individually after Pelosi sent a letter asking the president to order the Senate back to Washington to consider gun violence measures.

Schumer and Pelosi said they told Trump the best immediate step would be for the Senate to take up and pass the House bill. Trump, they said, "understood our interest in moving as quickly as possible to help save lives."

The politics of gun control are shifting amid the frequency and toll of mass shootings. Spending to support candidates backing tougher gun control measures — mostly Democrats — surged in the 2018 midterms, even as campaign spending by the NRA declined.

The NRA says proposals being discussed in Congress would not have prevented the shootings in Texas and Ohio.

McConnell rejected the idea of reconvening the Senate, saying calling senators back now would just lead to people "scoring points and nothing would happen."

Instead, the GOP leader wants to spend the August recess talking with Democratic and Republican senators to see what's possible. Senators have been talking among themselves, and holding conference calls, to sort out strategy.

The politics of gun violence are difficult for Republicans, including McConnell. He could risk losing support as he seeks re-election in Kentucky if he were to back restricting access to firearms and ammunition. Other Republicans, including those in Colorado, Maine and swing states, also would face difficult votes, despite the clamor for gun laws.

Walmart removes images of violence in stores after deadly weekend shootings

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Walmart has ordered workers to remove video game signs and displays that depict violence from stores nationwide after 22 people died in a shooting at one of its Texas stores, but will continue to sell guns.

In an internal memo, the retailer told employees to remove any violent marketing material, unplug Xbox and PlayStation consoles that show violent video games and turn off any violence depicted on screens in its electronics departments.

Employees also were asked to shut off hunting season videos in the sporting goods department where guns are sold.

"Remove from the sales floor or turn off these items immediately," the memo said.

Walmart will still sell the violent video games and hasn't made any changes to its gun sales policy, despite pressure from workers, politicians and activists to do so.

"We've taken this action out of respect for the incidents of the past week," Walmart spokeswoman Tara House said in an email. She declined to answer any questions beyond the statement.

"That is a non-answer and a non-solution," said Thomas Marshall, who works at Walmart's e-commerce division in San Bruno, California, and has helped organize a petition to get the company to stop selling guns. He said they plan to email the petition, which has more than 53,000 signatures, to Walmart CEO Doug McMillon on Friday.

After the massacre at the El Paso Walmart this weekend, McMillon said the company "will be thought-



AP Photo

Walmart is taking down all signs and displays from its stores that depict violence, following a mass shooting at its El Paso, Texas, location that left 22 people dead. The retailer, according to an internal memo, instructed employees to turn off or unplug any video game consoles that show violent games, as well as ensure that no movies depicting violence are playing in its electronics departments.

ful and deliberate in our responses."

After the mass shooting at a Parkland, Florida, high school last year, Walmart Inc. banned sales of firearms and ammunition to people younger than 21. It had stopped selling AR-15s and other semi-automatic weapons in 2015, citing weak sales.

The massacre in El Paso was followed by another shooting hours later in Dayton, Ohio, that killed nine people.

President Donald Trump blamed "gruesome and grisly video games" for encouraging violence Monday, but there is no known link between violent video games and violent acts.

The United States has had 254 mass shootings — instances of four or more people being shot in individual outbreaks — in 2019, according to the Gun Violence Archive. That's more mass shootings than days so far this year.

Scott Galloway, a marketing professor at New York University, said the move to hide violent imagery in stores was "a cheap

attempt to distract consumers and the media from the real issue, which is, Walmart continues to sell guns."

Other companies have made changes after the shootings. ESPN postponed the airing of an esports competition for shooting game "Apex Legends." And NBC Universal pulled some ads for its upcoming movie "The Hunt," which depicted characters hunting and shooting at each other.

The killings have put the country on edge.

On Thursday, panicked shoppers fled a Walmart in Springfield, Missouri, after a man carrying a rifle and wearing body armor walked around the store before being stopped by an off-duty firefighter. No shots were fired and the man was arrested after surrendering.

On Friday, Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a Democrat running for president, blasted Walmart in a tweet.

"The weapons they sell are killing their own customers and employees. No profit is worth those lives. Do the right thing — stop selling guns," she wrote.

Biden centers campaign where he started: Donald Trump's character

By BILL BARROW
Associated Press

BOONE, Iowa — Joe Biden's campaign is not anchored in a big policy idea like Bernie Sanders' Medicare for All. He is not proposing transformative change like Elizabeth Warren. Instead, Biden's call to voters is a more visceral one, casting the 2020 race as a test of the country's character.



Biden

The recent back-to-back mass killings in Texas and Ohio have, for now, allowed Biden to re-center his campaign on those ideas. After spending the past three months largely on defense over a long policy record that draws fire from the Democratic Party's most progressive corners, Biden reasserted himself this week with a blistering take-down of President Donald Trump's racist language and the ways in which some of the Republican president's anti-immigrant outbursts could have inspired one of the shootings.

"I will not let this man be re-elected president of the United States of Amer-

ica," Biden said this week in Burlington, Iowa, where he weaved between hushed disappointment and incredulous fury over a president who offers "no moral leadership" and has "no interest in unifying this nation."

Biden has hardly been alone among Democratic presidential candidates in assailing Trump after the latest killings. The shooting suspect in El Paso has been linked to a racist screed that echoed many of the president's own tirades about an immigrant

"invasion," prompting at least two of Biden's rivals to brand Trump a "white supremacist."

Yet, only Biden has made questions of character — that of Trump and the nation — the centerpiece of his White House bid. He says it was Trump's equivocating response to the 2017 racial clash in Charlottesville, Virginia, that prompted him to run and he has repeatedly declared the election a battle "for the soul of the nation."

There are risks, of course, for Biden as he asserts so relentlessly that "the words of a president matter."

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