

Control: Lawmakers push for more gun control

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Kevin Starrett, executive director of the Oregon Firearms Federation, said requiring that guns be locked up is “rendering firearms useless” because it will take too long to get the weapon out in an emergency.

Relatives of the victims of the 2012 mass shooting at Clackamas Town Center wanted to impose the storage mandate through a ballot measure earlier this year. Their effort stalled after the National Rifle Association, the state firearms federation and other gun rights advocates challenged the ballot language in court. The Oregon Supreme Court dismissed the challenge, but that left only a month for measure supporters to collect 88,000 signatures.

State Rep. Barbara Smith Warner, D-Portland, and state Sen. James Manning Jr., D-Eugene, are now championing the storage requirement through legislation.

“It codifies things that many reasonable gun owners do already: safely storing your weapon, making sure kids can’t access it and if they do, that they’re supervised,” Smith Warner said.

If passed, the law would be called the Cindy Yuille

and Steve Forsyth Act, named for two victims of the Clackamas shooting.

Police said the shooter, Jacob Tyler Roberts, used a semiautomatic rifle he stole from a friend’s home.

In what Smith Warner described as a public health crisis, an average of 456 Oregonians die each year from firearm injuries, according to the Oregon Health Authority. There is no data on how many of those deaths were the result of unsecured guns.

Most states don’t require gun locks even though such laws effectively prevent suicides, according to the Giffords Law Center.

In Massachusetts, the only state that requires all firearms be locked when not in use, guns are used in about 9 percent of youth suicides compared with 39 percent nationally, according to the law center.

“I think that this legislation has the potential to have bipartisan support in the Legislature,” said Henry Wessinger, president of State of Safety Action, the group behind the proposed safe storage ballot measure.

“If you are looking at what is the next gun safety policy Oregon could implement, this is the one that would save the most lives

and would reduce the most amount of gun violence without preventing people from being able to purchase a gun who are currently able to purchase a gun or without telling people that they can’t purchase certain types of guns.”

Gov. Kate Brown hasn’t yet proposed any gun reforms, though during her campaign for re-election she said she wanted to give the Oregon State Police more time to conduct background checks on potential gun buyers.

“The governor looks forward to continuing conversations with legislators about which concepts should move forward to improve the safety of Oregonians,” said her press secretary, Nikki Fisher.

Other gun law changes legislators may consider in the next session:

- Safe storage tax credit — State Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, wants to give tax credits to gun owners for buying a safe or lock for their gun.

“That is still (in) the incubator stage of development,” Prozanski said. “I have been working with the revenue office looking at how such a program could be funded.”

- Handguns in public buildings — Senate Major-

ity Leader Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, proposes closing a loophole that allows people to take concealed handguns into public buildings.

“A number of public entities would like to have the option to keep anyone with a gun off the grounds,” Burdick said.

Those entities include schools, universities and the Port of Portland, she said.

- Ghost guns/3D printed guns — Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum wants to regulate “ghost guns” made from kits or through 3D printing. Such guns can be manufactured without a serial number and are untraceable.

- Age to buy “assault” rifles — Legislative leaders want to raise the legal age to buy assault rifles from 18 to 21 but have not yet defined what guns would be covered.

- Domestic violence loophole — Legislative leaders want to remove a loophole that allows some domestic violence abusers to keep their guns. “Right now, if you have a domestic violence restraining order, you have the opportunity to request a hearing for it,” Burdick said. Abusers “have learned that if they don’t request the hearing, they get to keep their guns.”

Undies: A unique way to think about soil health

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Robert Hathorne, a spokesman for NRCS Oregon, said the more microbes break down undies, the stronger the indication of healthy soil.

“It’s a way to start thinking about what’s happening that causes soil health,” Hathorne said.

Six Oregon producers took the challenge in 2018, including Woody Wolfe, Joe Dawson, Alan Klages and Mark Butterfield, of Wallowa County and Joe McElligott and Corey Miller, of Morrow County.

“They thought it was all pretty funny,” Hathorne said. “All of them had really strong results from what we found.”

The only exception was Butterfield, who was unable to find his underwear after sneaky cows

stole the marker flag he had used to mark the spot.

Even McElligott and Miller, who farm dryland wheat in an area that receives just 9-12 inches of rain every year, found their undies were eaten down to just the elastic. Both growers use a no-till or reduced tillage system, leaving crop residue in the field to replenish soil organic matter.

Hathorne said the NRCS is hoping the results lead to more interest in the “Soil Your Undies” challenge in 2019. To participate, farmers should “plant” a pair of 100 percent cotton underwear at the beginning of the normal growing season, and leave them for at least 60 days. Send “before” and “after” photos, along with information about the farm and growing practices, to orinfo@nrcs.usda.gov, or to any local NRCS office.

Oregon likely to gain Congressional seat, forecast shows

By Jeff Mapes
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Oregon is still on track to gain a sixth seat in the U.S. House, according to elections experts studying new Census Bureau population estimates released Wednesday.

Kimball Brace of Election Data Services in Virginia said he projects that Oregon should gain another seat with about 140,000 people to spare. That’s relatively close, but not as close to the margin as it is for some states.

“There are still some potential changes coming that could impact Oregon,” he said. These include pop-

ulation changes caused by a disaster or an economic shock — or big differences in what the Census Bureau turns up when it attempts to count the entire population in 2020.

Another firm, Polidata in Vermont, also projects that Oregon will gain a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Under current Oregon law, it will be up to the state Legislature to redraw district lines in 2021. And if Democrats maintain control of the Legislature, they will be able to send a bill to Gov. Kate Brown — her term runs until early 2023 — even if Republicans object.

Growing wildfire costs get governor’s attention

By Claire Withycombe
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregonians saw \$62 million in private grazing and timberland go up in flames this fire season.

Such seasons continue to grow worse, longer and more expensive in the state, posing more threats to life and property.

Gov. Kate Brown has proposed a special council to take a new look at how the state fights fires and pays for that work.

The state Forestry

Department reported to legislators recently that large fires cost the agency \$102 million this year.

The federal government will cover much of that, and private landowners chip in some, but the high price tag still creates a budgeting frenzy as the state waits for federal reimbursement.

Brown’s proposed council is likely to look at whether the state is staffing fires efficiently.

Every summer, desk-bound Forestry Department employees like accountants

and human resources staff can be taken off their regular duties to help on fire crews.

That is called a “militia model.” Other states, like California, have a dedicated firefighting agency.

As fire seasons grow longer, militia-style firefighting could actually cost the state more by taking employees off key, but non-fire, functions of the department for months at a time.

The governor’s council is likely to include officials from Oregon’s tribes, state

and federal forest agencies, environmental groups and landowners. Forest practices likely won’t be part of council’s review but could become a consideration.

Brown also wants the state to hire a consultant to analyze budgeting for fires. Oregon’s byzantine array of reimbursements, borrowing and insurance burdens the state’s general fund.

From 2008 to 2012, annual fire costs in the state hovered at \$20 million or less, according to state data.

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