

# Measure 114 ups ante on gun control

By PETER WONG  
Oregon Capital Bureau



Clay Winton, owner of Crosshair Customs in Baker City, chats with customers March 11, 2018, at the Pendleton Gun Show. The passage of Measure 114 would make obtaining a gun more difficult and outlaw magazines that hold more than 10 rounds.

Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

SALEM — Measure 114 is not the first proposed gun regulation to prompt a public debate in Oregon.

But it is the first on a statewide ballot in more than 20 years, since voters in 2000 approved criminal background checks for purchasers at gun shows.

The Legislature has passed several bills in the past eight years, including a 2021 law requiring safe storage of firearms and enabling public schools, community colleges and state universities to ban firearms from their grounds.

Like the 2000 measure, Measure 114 is an initiative that qualified for the ballot by petitions sponsored by Lift Every Voice Oregon, a coalition of religious and other organizations. The petition drive stalled until the May 24 mass shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, where 19 children and two adults died.

But it is opposed by gun rights advocates, including the Oregon Hunters Association, Oregon State Shooting Association, Oregon Gun Owners and Oregon Firearms Federation. The Oregon State Sheriffs Association also opposes it.

Of the major candidates for governor, only Democrat Tina Kotek supports it; Republican Christine Drazan and unaffiliated candidate Betsy Johnson oppose it. They also were on opposing sides of the 2021 law, which passed as Senate Bill 554. (A petition drive came up short to force a statewide vote on it.)

Gun violence has been prominent recently with two deaths Aug. 28 at a supermarket in Bend and two stu-

dents wounded in a drive-by shooting Oct. 18 near Jefferson High School in Portland.

## A summary

Key provisions of Measure 114:

- Firearms training: People must complete safety instruction, including classroom work and live-fire exercises, before city police or county sheriffs can issue them permits to buy or get guns. Such permits must be issued or denied within 30 days, and are valid for five years. Permits do not limit the number of firearms that can be obtained. The training is at people's own expense, and must be conducted by instructors certified by police.

Police can deny purchase permits if they deem people to be a danger to themselves or others. Police can seize permits if the holders are accused of crimes that otherwise would disqualify them from obtaining permits. There is an appeals process with a limit of 15 business days for a decision.

These requirements apply

to purchasers, but they are not retroactive to current firearms owners.

- Background checks: State police will continue to conduct such checks — the maximum fee is \$65; for renewals, \$50 — and compile a database of purchase permits that local agencies approve or deny, and why applications are denied. Annual reports by county are required starting in January 2024. Checks must be completed; state police have 24 hours to determine if applicants are barred from possessing firearms under one of four categories, although reports may be delayed longer if needed to complete investigations.

- Ammunition magazines: They are limited to 10 rounds. Within six months of the measure's approval, sale, use or possession of larger-capacity magazines is a Class A misdemeanor. Exceptions are made for use on the property of a firearms owner, at shooting ranges and competitions, and hunting while consistent with regulations. Transport to a permissible location

is a legal defense if the magazines are secured separately from firearms.

## What supporters say

According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention statistics, Oregon recorded 592 deaths by firearms in 2020, the latest year available, for a rate of 13 per 100,000 population. The comparable rate for neighboring states: Washington, 10.9; California, 8.5; Nevada, 17; Idaho, 17.6.

Measure 114 advocates say that unrestricted access to firearms increases the likelihood of injuries or deaths, either to those who possess them or to others.

"When someone does not handle a firearm safely, accidental deaths can result," said John Hummel, Deschutes County district attorney, during a debate sponsored Oct. 21 by the City Club of Portland.

Hummel said a permit-to-purchase process would not only allow police to intervene if they deem would-be purchasers are dangers to themselves or others, it

would let them obtain needed mental health treatment. Suicide accounted for about 80% of the deaths, homicides for most of the rest.

Advocates mention a study by the Center for Gun Violence Prevention and Policy at Johns Hopkins University, which concluded that a similar law in Connecticut reduced the firearms murder rate by 28%, and the firearms suicide rate by 33%. In contrast, after Missouri in 2007 repealed a law requiring a permit to purchase, the study concluded that its gun homicide rate went up by 47%, and its gun suicide rate by 23%. Connecticut tightened its law in 2013 after the December 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, where 20 children and six adults died, plus the 20-year-old gunman and his mother.

"The evidence from Johns Hopkins says that Measure 114 will save lives," Hummel said. "It comes down to this: Is the status quo acceptable to you? The loss of 600 Oregonians every year to gunshots is unacceptable to me."

Miles Rowe Pendleton, president of the Eugene-Springfield branch of the NAACP, said the measure also offers spinoff benefits for families and communities.

"While we correctly view gun violence as a health-centered issue ... gun violence is also an economic issue," he said during the debate.

## What opponents say

But Kevin Starrett, executive director of the Oregon Firearms Federation — which bills itself as a no-compromise organization on gun rights — disparaged those and other statistics, some compiled by the joint public health school at Oregon Health & Science University

and Portland State University.

"All the statistics they are citing are cherry-picked data that are unreliable and unsupportable to begin with," Starrett said. "These are the statistics dredged up by institutions that already have a bias and reach conclusions that the people who pay for them want to have."

Starrett and other gun rights advocates argue that the measure simply would result in more difficulties for people to exercise their constitutional right to obtain firearms for self-defense, without doing much to deter those bent on violent crime.

"It was drafted by people who admit they know nothing about firearms and have irrational fears of them," he said. "The measure is a fraud promoted by dishonest media and is as misleading as the ballot measure that now has our streets littered with bodies of overdose victims."

Paul Donheffner, a spokesman for the Oregon Hunters Association, said the measure enables delays and new restrictions by city police, county sheriffs and the Oregon State Police without the needed funding or staffing.

Starrett said none of the bills that the Legislature has passed starting in 2015 has helped stem gun violence. He said he supports stricter laws against gun "predators" and expanded access to mental health.

"We have seen a massive increase in firearms violence concurrently with all the new firearms regulations that have been introduced since 2015," he said. "I would submit that creating gun control is increasing firearms violence."

But Hummel said: "He will never support any gun safety regulation whatsoever."

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# Oregonians favor voting changes

By ANNA DEL SAVIO  
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — While Oregon's voting rate remains among the highest in the country, most Oregonians aren't satisfied with current election systems, a new poll finds.

A survey conducted by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center found that less than one-third of Oregonians think the process for electing the governor and state legislators

should stay the same. One-third of Oregonians think voters should be able to rank their top three candidates, while 24% think there should be runoff elections if no candidate receives more than 50% of the vote.

Alternative voting systems are increasingly on the minds of voters as the November election approaches. With Betsy Johnson running as an unaffiliated candidate for governor — with more funding and support than minor party or unaffiliated candidates in recent history — vote-splitting is a concern for some voters.

Voters in Portland and Multnomah County will also weigh in on ballot measures that would implement ranked-choice voting for county and city officials in future elections.

Statewide, just 36% of Oregonians are satisfied with the political party they're registered with.

"I just wish that there was something better because it just doesn't even seem effective anymore," Leanne Spivey, a Marion County resident in her 50s, said of the current election system. "I don't even feel like the average person, the average citizen or person that lives anywhere, their voice really matters," Spivey said. "It almost makes me not

want to vote — but I do vote."

For many, ranked-choice voting or other voting systems seem confusing.

Spivey said she was considering voting for either Christine Drazan or Betsy Johnson but was worried about splitting the vote by casting her ballot for Johnson.

"If (ranked-choice voting) could help somebody make that decision, and not feel like their vote is wasted, it would probably be helpful, but I don't know how these things are tallied and messed around with," Spivey said.

Benton County adopted ranked-choice voting for county commissioner races when there are more than three candidates. In Benton County, county commissioner is a partisan position, so ranked choice voting is only used if three or more parties nominate different candidates. The system was first used in 2020, but the winning candidates for both positions received more than half the votes in the first round, so the additional rankings weren't necessary.

Under ranked choice voting, voters rank candidates on their ballots. When elections officials receive ballots, they first total all the top-ranked candidates. If no candidate receives more than half of the votes, the candidate who received the fewest votes is eliminated. The votes that went to that candidate are then distributed to the second-choice candidates. If there is still no candidate with

more than half of the votes, the process repeats.

"Ranked choice voting could end strategic voting and better reflect the will of the people," Seth Hill, a Multnomah County man, wrote. "Right now I feel that as a Democrat, the only choice I have when voting is to stick with whoever the party selected, regardless of what I think of them."

Forty-three percent of Oregonians said they would support an election system that used ranked-choice voting and multi-member districts. Though that isn't a majority, only 28% of Oregonians said they opposed that system; 29% said they didn't know.

Some respondents voiced concerns about the cost of multi-member districts, driven up by more elected officials' salaries, and the difficulty of getting things done with too many cooks in the kitchen.

Statewide, 37% of Oregonians said the Democratic and Republican parties have too much say in selecting candidates to compete in the general election, while 27% said the parties have the right amount of say and 8% said they have too little say.

State primaries are handled in a range of ways across the country, but Oregon is one of just nine states with closed primaries, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Only voters registered as Democrats or Republicans can vote in that party's primary election.

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