

# Obama Unveils \$500 Million Gun Violence Package

WASHINGTON (AP) — Braced for a fight, President Barack Obama on Wednesday unveiled the most sweeping proposals for curbing gun violence in two decades, pressing a reluctant Congress to pass universal background checks and bans on military-style assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines like the ones used in the Newtown, Conn., school shooting.

A month after that horrific massacre, Obama also used his presidential powers to enact 23 measures that don't require the backing of lawmakers. The president's executive actions include ordering federal agencies to make more data available for background checks, appointing a director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and directing the Centers for Disease Control to research gun violence.

But the president, speaking at White House ceremony, focused his attention on the divided Congress, saying only lawmakers could enact the most effective measures for preventing more mass shootings.

"To make a real and lasting difference, Congress must act,"

Obama said. "And Congress must act soon."

The president vowed to use "whatever weight this office holds" to press lawmakers into action on his \$500 million plan. He is also calling for improvements in school safety, including putting 1,000 police officers in schools and bolstering mental health care by training more health professionals to deal with young people who may be at risk.

Even supportive lawmakers say the president's gun control proposals — most of which are opposed by the powerful National Rifle Association — face long odds on Capitol Hill.

House Speaker John Boehner's office was non-committal to the president's package of proposed legislation, but signaled no urgency to act. "House committees of jurisdiction will review these recommendations," Boehner spokesman Michael Steel said. "And if the Senate passes a bill, we will also take a look at that."

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy said ahead of Obama's presentation that he didn't know whether an assault weapons ban could pass the Senate,

but said there are some measures that can, such as improved background checks.

"There are some who say nothing will pass. I disagree with that," Leahy, D-Vt., told students at Georgetown University Law Center. "What I'm interested in is what we can get."

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., called Obama's package "thoughtful recommendations" and said the Senate would consider legislation addressing gun violence early this year.

"The tragedy at Sandy Hook was just the latest sad reminder that we are not doing enough to protect our citizens — especially our children — from gun violence and a culture of violence, and all options should be on the table moving forward," he said.

Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus dismissed Obama's measures as "an executive power grab."

"He paid lip service to our fundamental constitutional rights," Priebus said of the president, "but took actions that disregard the Second Amendment and the legislative

process."

Acknowledging the tough fight ahead, Obama said there will be pundits, politicians and special interest groups that will seek to "gin up fear" that the White House wants to take away the right to own a gun.

"Behind the scenes, they'll do everything they can to block any commonsense reform and make sure nothing changes whatsoever," he said. "The only way we will be able to change is if their audience, their constituents, their membership says this time must be different, that this time we must do something to protect our communities and our kids."

The president was flanked by children who wrote him letters about gun violence in the weeks following the Newtown shooting. Families of those killed in the massacre, as well as survivors of the shooting, were also in the audience, along with law enforcement officers and congressional lawmakers.

"This is our first task as a society, keeping our children safe," Obama said. "This is how we will be judged."

Seeking to expand the impetus for addressing gun violence beyond the Newtown shooting, the president said more than 900 Americans have been killed by guns in the month since the elementary school massacre.

"Every day we wait, the number will keep growing," he said.

The White House has signaled that Obama could launch a campaign to boost public support for his proposals. Nearly six in 10 Americans want stricter gun laws in the aftermath of the Newtown shooting, with majorities favoring a nationwide ban on military-style, rapid-fire weapons and limits on gun violence depicted in video games, movies and TV shows, according to a new Associated Press-GfK poll.

A lopsided 84 percent of adults would like to see the establishment of a federal standard for background checks for people buying guns at gun shows, the poll showed.

The president based his propos-

als on recommendations from an administration-wide task force led by Vice President Joe Biden. His plan marks the most comprehensive effort to address gun violence since Congress passed the 1994 ban on high-grade, military-style assault weapons. The ban expired in 2004, and Obama wants lawmakers to renew and expand it.

Other measures Obama wants Congress to take up include limiting high-capacity ammunition magazines and requiring background checks for all gun buyers in an attempt to close the so-called "gun-show loophole" that allows people to buy guns at trade shows and over the Internet without submitting to background checks.

Obama also intends to seek confirmation for B. Todd Jones, who has served as acting director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives since 2011.

The president's plan does little to address violent images in video games, movies and entertainment, beyond asking the CDC to study their impact on gun crimes. Some

pro-gun lawmakers who are open to addressing stricter arms legislation have insisted they would do so only in tandem with recommendations for addressing violence in entertainment.

The president's long list of executive orders also include:

- Ordering tougher penalties for people who lie on background checks and requiring federal agencies to make relevant data available to the federal background check system.
- Ending limits that make it more difficult for the government to research gun violence, such as gathering data on guns that fall into criminal hands.
- Requiring federal law enforcement to trace guns recovered in criminal investigations.
- Giving schools flexibility to use federal grant money to improve school safety, such as by hiring school resource officers.
- Giving communities grants to institute programs to keep guns away from people who shouldn't have them.

## Flu: from page one

Geographic influenza activity takes into account the number of areas in a state that report increases in laboratory-confirmed cases of influenza, influenza outbreaks, and other indicators of activity.

Google's national flu trend maps, which track flu-related searches, are almost solid red — indicating intense activity — and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's weekly FluView maps, which track confirmed cases, are nearly solid brown — indicating widespread activity.

The epidemic is expected to worsen, as flu season usually peaks in February.

Locally, officials with the Seminole Hospital District (SHD) have stated they have seen their fair share of the influenza virus this season, through admissions into Memorial Hospital, patient visits to the hospital's emergency room, and visits with the medical district's physician's offices.

Dr. Jean Pierre Letellier, a physician with the SHD stated Thursday afternoon influenza cases are still being seen locally, but was not as prevalent as one month ago.

"We saw a lot of (type) A and B cases about a month ago," said Letellier, "but those have died down somewhat. However, we are be-

ginning to see another round A strain again."

According to the medical website WebMD.com, Type A flu or influenza A viruses are capable of infecting people as well as animals; although it is more common for people to suffer the ailments associated with this type of flu. Wild birds commonly act as the hosts for this flu virus.

Type A flu virus is constantly changing and is generally responsible for the large flu epidemics. The influenza A2 virus (and other variants of influenza) is spread by people who are already infected. The most common flu hot spots are those surfaces that an infected person has touched and rooms where he has been recently, especially areas where he has been sneezing.

Unlike type A flu viruses, type B flu is found only in humans. Type B flu may cause a less severe reaction than type A flu virus, but occasionally, type B flu can still be extremely harmful. Influenza type B viruses are not classified by subtype and do not cause pandemics.

Influenza C viruses are also found in people. They are, however, milder than either type A or B. People generally do not become very ill from the influenza type C viruses. Type C flu viruses do not cause epidemics.

"We probably have another month or so (of the peak flu) season, before we see a drop off (in the number of cases)," said Letellier.

Dr. Jeffrey Kahn, director of infectious diseases at Children's Medical Center in Dallas, stated in a recent Associated Press interview that "it's

unclear when the flu season will end, based on what could be the peak."

"We're about halfway there, but the flu is unpredictable," he said.

While some hospitals and clinics in Fort Worth and Austin have reported a decrease in patients with flu-like symptoms in recent days, emergency rooms in Dallas, El Paso and elsewhere remain crowded with flu patients. Kahn said his children's hospital remains extremely busy and that this flu season has been more severe than in past years.

The number of positive flu tests was nearly 1,600 the last week of December but less than 500 the first week of January, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services.

But that data is likely to change as more reports are added. In the 2011-12 season, several reporting periods ended up with increased numbers, including the third week of March, initially reported as having less than 100 positive flu tests. In the following week's report, the third week of March showed nearly 300 positive flu tests.

At least six flu-related deaths of children have been reported in Texas since October; the state doesn't track adult deaths.

Estimated figures on the local number of cases of the flu overseen by local physicians and the Seminole Hospital District were sought by the *Seminole Sentinel* in conducting this story, but SHD officials have been unable to respond back to the newspaper publication as of presstime.

## Seagraves School Board Celebrates in January

SEAGRAVES -- January is School Board Recognition Month, and a good time to spotlight more than 7,000 women and men who serve school districts across the state and help promote public education.

Seagraves ISD, during the month, has joined other school districts across the state to celebrate the countless contributions of these dedicated community leaders.

"Local school board members work tirelessly and devote hundreds of hours to lead our students to success," said Dr. Kevin Spiller, Superintendent of Schools for Seagraves ISD. "Setting aside time in January is one small way to celebrate their service to our community and say thanks for caring so much about the future of every child enrolled in our schools."

Spiller added: "School Board members shoulder critical responsibilities as advocates for our children. They face difficult challenges and make hard decisions with the overall goal of promoting student achievement. Working as a vital link between the community and the classroom, the Board is responsible for our annual budget, students, employees and campuses. They serve as the passionate voice for public education and help ensure the future of our state and nation. We truly appreciate every board member for voluntarily tackling the enormous job of governing our local school district."

Members of the Seagraves ISD Board of Trustees include: Lee Billings, President; Tim Carmichael, Vice President; Wesley Rodgers, Secretary; Grady Billings, Trustee; Sulema Cortez, Trustee; Jeanette Hadaway, Trustee, and; Lisa Webb, Trustee.



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