

# Florida adopts wide package of gun laws, while Washington stalls

*Washington (CNN)* Less than a month after a gunman stormed a Florida high school and killed 17 people, the state's Republican-controlled Legislature passed sweeping legislation this week to combat gun violence, acting at a rapid pace as students demanded that lawmakers tackle the emotionally charged issue.

Republican Gov. Rick Scott signed the bill Friday.

Meanwhile, in Washington gun-related legislation is moving at a glacial speed — if at all. Activists and lawmakers are asking why a state legislature can pass a measure with at least six major provisions while Congress hasn't held a single vote on any proposal.

To be clear, the US House of Representatives is set to hold a vote next week on a bill that gives schools money to strengthen security, which is similar to one of the provisions in the Florida bill. But there are no signs that the US House or Senate plans to take up any gun control-related bills in the near future.

"It's just the nature of the place," Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Florida, told reporters this week when asked about Washington's slow pace compared with Tallahassee's. "We don't move as fast as the Florida Legislature does."

## Florida's unique circumstances

The Legislature in the Sunshine State meets once a year for 60 days, and it happened to be in session this winter when the shooting occurred last month. Republicans have majority control in the state House and Senate, as well as the governor's office — a combination that can make laws move quickly.

While Washington is also controlled by one party, it faces a unique set of challenges that not all state legislatures have, Rubio says. For starters, Congress is a diverse body made up of representatives from all 50 states.

"As a result, you know, there are people in different parts of the country that have different views on these issues. Some very strong in one direction, some very strong in the other," Rubio said. "Everyone in the Florida Legislature represents Florida, or a part of Florida."

The US Senate also has a steep 60-vote threshold to advance most legislation, a rule designed to ensure at least some bipartisan support. Republicans hold only a

slim 51-49 majority in the Senate, making it difficult to hit that magic number of 60, especially on controversial legislation when members tend to stick to a party line vote. So even though Republicans control Congress, that's far from a guarantee that they'll get their legislation passed.

Business in Washington is also largely beholden to major national news of the day. Gun control was a dominant topic soon after the shooting, but in the last week alone, the Senate has been tied up with a banking bill and questions about President Donald Trump's tariff proposals.

"I was amazed today on the morning shows. I was on one of them and nothing, nothing," Sen. Jeff Flake, an Arizona Republican, told CNN this week, saying he wasn't asked about guns. "It's gone."

## **Legislative efforts on the state and federal level**

Along with funding more school security and mental health services, the Florida bill raise requires a three-day waiting period for firearm purchases (with some exceptions), bans the sale or possession of bump fire stocks, gives law enforcement the authority to seize weapons from potentially dangerous people, and raises the age requirement for all gun purchases to 21 from 18 (the federal age minimum is 18 for a rifle and 21 for a handgun).

In Washington, members have introduced a flurry of bills since the Parkland shooting. Earlier this week, Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina and Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut rolled out a bill that would allow federal courts to issue gun restraining orders against potentially dangerous people. And both senators from Florida — Rubio and Democrat Bill Nelson — introduced legislation that would encourage states to adopt similar proposals.

Other recent bills include a bipartisan Senate bill to raise the age requirement to buy a rifle and a House Democratic bill to ban assault weapons.

But there's been little to no movement on any of them, as it's doubtful they could get 60 votes.

The bill that has the most potential at this point is a bipartisan bill to improve the National Instant Criminal Background Check System to prevent those with domestic assault convictions from getting weapons. That bill, known as "Fix NICS," was introduced last fall after a gunman killed 26 people at a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, and it's led by Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, the No. 2 Republican in the Senate, and Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut.



## Senate Judiciary to hold hearing on Parkland shooting, curbing gun violence

With more than 60 cosponsors, the bill would usually be poised for smooth passage. But not all the Democratic cosponsors are promising to advance the legislation. Since the Parkland shooting, many are demanding that the measure include more gun control amendments, seeing this as a rare opportunity to address gun laws further.

In another stumbling block, the bill is being held up procedurally by at least one Republican. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who is also a cosponsor and has expressed support for the bill multiple times, could still move it to the floor, but he has not indicated his plans.

"We are looking at all available options, but I don't have an announcement for you yet," said his spokesman Don Stewart.

If McConnell were to bring the bill to the floor, Democrats would demand that he open it up to debate more amendments. If he doesn't agree to that and pushes ahead with a clean Fix NICS bill, it's still unclear whether all Democratic cosponsors of the bill, including Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, would support it, since, in their view, it doesn't do enough to address mass shootings.

Even if it passed the Senate, House Speaker Paul Ryan hasn't committed to taking it up in the House.

For leverage, Democrats are also eyeing a massive rally in Washington on March 24 with students, activists and celebrities demanding more gun control laws. Schumer told reporters this week that Democrats will attempt to "force floor action" after that rally. The could involve attempting to block unrelated votes.

For now, however, many Democrats feel a diminishing sense of optimism for an imminent debate on gun control. "We may still see some movement if the President personally pushes for it," said one Democratic aide, though the aide wasn't holding out hope.

Nelson was asked this week by a reporter whether Congress can pass a muscular bill on gun control, beyond the bill he introduced with Rubio, which simply encourages states to adopt gun restraining orders.

"The answer is no," Nelson said. "Not now."

*CNN's Lauren Fox and Ted Barrett contributed to this report.*

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