

# Gun debate coming to Salem

By Lauren Dake / *The Bulletin*

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SALEM — As discussions surrounding gun control fire up the nation, Oregon's lawmakers are preparing to wade into the debate this legislative session.

Gov. John Kitzhaber directed his staff to delve into firearm regulation, school safety measures and mental health issues, hoping for what his spokesman said could be the "basis for a comprehensive approach to the problem."

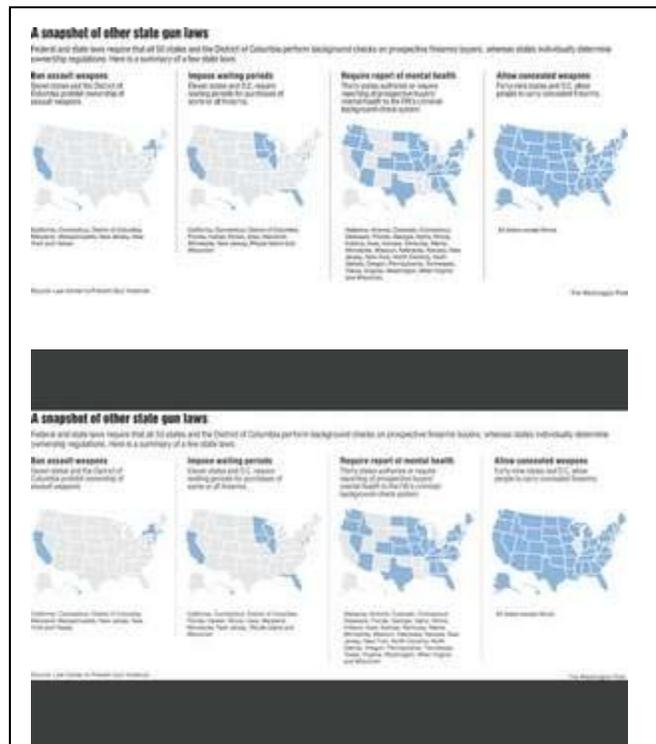
"Nothing is off the table. (The governor) sees no reason for civilians to have assault weapons, but he has not yet reviewed any specific legislative proposals," Tim Raphael, the governor's spokesman, wrote in an email.

Sen. Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, first campaigned on creating stronger gun laws in the state in 1996. She was not a favorite to win the race, but took her landslide victory as a sign that people were interested in stronger gun control laws.

"Somebody has to speak up for gun safety," Burdick said. "The gun lobby is so strong in Oregon and nationally, someone has to speak up for the other side. And that seems to be the role that has fallen to me."

Burdick pushed an initiative to require criminal background checks at gun shows. Voters approved the measure in 2000. But she has yet to get enough votes on legislation that would prohibit guns on school grounds, including those carried by concealed weapon permit holders. She plans to push similar legislation again this session, along with bills that would ban assault weapons and large-capacity magazines.

In the wake of the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., where a gunman killed 26 people, including 20 children, and the recent shooting at the Clackamas Town Center in Portland, Burdick is hoping she has the momentum to turn legislation regulating guns into state law.



## Oregon's current gun laws

Oregon laws on gun ownership and gun sales are more restrictive than most rural states, but less stringent than those in California and other large states in the Midwest and Northeast.

However, no one measure provides a complete picture of a state's policies. State laws detailed below are a partial look at gun policy in Oregon; the state has many more laws detailing everything from prohibitions against firing a gun across a state highway to the authority of cities to regulate the sale of used guns at pawnshops.

- There are no restrictions on the number of firearms or quantity of ammunition a buyer can purchase at any one time. There is no waiting period on the transfer of firearms.
- There are no restrictions on the sale or possession of high-capacity magazines, semi-automatic firearms or

"I do expect in light of the current situation to pick up some Republican support," Burdick said.

Democrats control both chambers of the Legislature this session. But that doesn't mean enacting gun legislation won't be a battle.

Rep. Dennis Richardson, R-Central Point, made national headlines when he sent an email to school superintendents saying that if someone had been armed at Sandy Hook Elementary School, the result could have been different.

"If I had been a teacher or the principal at the Sandy Hook Elementary School and if the school district did not preclude me from having access to a firearm, either by a concealed carry or locked in my desk, most of the murdered children would still be alive, and the gunman would still be dead, and not by suicide," Richardson wrote.

In his newsletter this week, Richardson advocates for schools establishing a campus responder program.

"Campus Responders could be two or three responsible adult volunteers in every school (administrators, staff members, teachers or members of the community such as retired law enforcement or military personnel), who are enlisted and encouraged to obtain additional training and regular practice in the use of firearms," Richardson wrote. "Each Campus Responder would have a firearm concealed on their person or locked and concealed in a secure metal gun box bolted in their desks. School district employees with prior military or law enforcement experience would be the initial candidates for this voluntary assignment. No one outside of school and district administration would know the identity of these volunteers."

Burdick said Richardson's stance is "not the solution."

"We have tried over and over again to add more guns, add more guns, add more guns," she said. "And it has not worked, and to come out in a wake of a tragedy like this and say the solution is to add more guns, it boggles my mind. We need to subtract these weapons of war."

House Republican Leader-elect Rep. Mike McLane, of Powell Butte, pointed out that both tragedies took place with stolen guns.

firearms covered under the expired 1994 Federal Assault Weapons Ban. Automatic weapons — those which fire continuously as long as the trigger is depressed — are effectively illegal nationwide due to strict federal registration policies.

- Employers are not required to allow their employees to possess firearms in company parking lots.
- Open carrying of firearms in public is permitted, though cities or counties may enact laws restricting the open carrying of loaded firearms.
- Firearms and other weapons are banned in public buildings, including schools, hospitals and most state and local government buildings.
- Members of the military and law enforcement officers on official duty, as well as individuals with concealed carry licenses, are exempted from the prohibition on firearms in public buildings.
- Applicants for a license to carry a concealed handgun must be at least 21 years old and must complete a course on handgun safety or demonstrate competence with a handgun through past participation in shooting competition or military service. Applicants must pass a criminal background check, and will not be issued a license if they have been convicted of a felony, or convicted of a misdemeanor within four years of the date of the application.
- Gun dealers and gun show vendors must conduct a criminal background check on prospective buyers through the Oregon State Police. State law defines a gun show as any event where at least 25 firearms are on the premises and available for sale.
- The state's criminal background check forbids transfer of a firearm to anyone convicted of a felony, with outstanding felony warrants for their arrest or free on pre-trial release for an alleged felony. Anyone convicted of a misdemeanor involving violence within four years is ineligible. Anyone who has been committed to the Oregon Health Authority or otherwise determined to be mentally ill by a court may not purchase a firearm.
- Background checks are not required for private-party sales or transfers. However, it is a misdemeanor for a private citizen to knowingly sell or transfer a firearm to a person who would not be eligible to purchase a firearm from a dealer or gun show vendor.

— Bulletin staff report

"I certainly understand it's the responsibility of every gun owner to secure our firearms and that is a paramount duty for all of us, including me, who own firearms," McLane said. He said he hasn't read any specific legislation, but he's a strong supporter of the Second Amendment. He has a hard time envisioning himself supporting a ban on assault weapons.

"I believe my district is in support of the rights of citizens to bear arms and have concealed weapons with proper licenses," he said.

The conversation will be held in February, in the Legislature, he said.

"Right now, the whole nation is grieving," McLane said.

That conversation will also likely encompass mental health issues and how to funnel more money into community mental health programs.

"There tends to be a consistent pattern, a young man, late teens, early twenties, perpetuating these kinds of mass murders," said Rep. Peter Buckley, D-Portland, who sits on the state's powerful budget-writing committee.

From Columbine to Connecticut, Buckley said, young men have pulled the trigger.

"We need to look at that and investigate why is it, why is it that that age group is predominantly responsible for these actions and what is it about our access to mental health care that isn't working?" he said.

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