

Colorado lawmakers move forward on new gun-control measures

By Keith Coffman

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(Reuters) - The Democratic-controlled Colorado House of Representatives approved a package of strict gun-control measures late on Friday, in a state rocked by two of the deadliest mass shootings in U.S. history.

After a marathon session that stretched late into the evening, the state House voted to advance the proposals with little support from Republicans, but with a boost from Vice President Joe Biden, who called several wavering Democratic lawmakers and urged them to vote for the measures.

The proposals passed on a voice vote, with a formal vote scheduled for Monday. The bills must also pass a final vote in the state Senate, also controlled by Democrats, before it heads to Governor John Hickenlooper's desk.

Among the proposals are bills that would require background checks for all gun purchases - paid for by applicants - a ban on ammunition magazines with more than 15 rounds and a measure to allow colleges in the state to ban concealed weapons on campus.

"We had a full and fair debate, which is exactly how the process is supposed to work," House Speaker Mark Ferrandino said in a statement. "Opinions were sharply divided, but we got our work done, and I thank members on both sides of the aisle."

House Republican leader Mark Waller characterized the bills as a "knee-jerk reaction" to last year's massacre of school children in Connecticut and moviegoers in Aurora, Colorado.

"They (Democrats) are passing these without any evidence that there will be any impact on public safety," Waller told Reuters on Saturday.

Colorado has been shaken by two of the worst mass shootings in recent U.S. history. In 1999, two students at Columbine High School in Littleton shot dead

a teacher and 12 students before turning their guns on themselves.

Last July, a gunman opened fire inside an Aurora theater, killing 12, and wounding 58 others. The accused shooter, James Holmes, is awaiting trial on multiple counts of first-degree murder and attempted murder.

Emotions ran high during debate in Denver on Friday.

Several Democrats said they had received death threats for supporting gun control bills, and a gun-rights lobbyist was escorted out of the Capitol after a Republican lawmaker complained she was told a gun-rights group would run ads against her if she supported any of the bills.

And a Colorado-based manufacturer of ammunition magazines threatened to leave Colorado if a ban on high-capacity magazines becomes law, taking some 600 jobs with them.

Democrats amended the magazine-limit bill to allow the company to continue to sell the magazines for out-of-state use, leading Waller to call the Democrats hypocritical.

"Democrats stood in the well of the House and recounted all the mass shootings nationwide, then put in the amendment that says the company can sell magazines in every other state, including those that had tragic shootings," he said.

Biden's call to lawmakers during the debate asking them "to stay the course" is evidence state Democrats are being pressured to advance the president's gun-control agenda, Waller said.

Hickenlooper, a Democrat, said this week he supported the magazine limits and universal background check measures, but was undecided on the college campus ban.

(Editing by Dan Whitcomb and Todd Eastham)