

Bipartisan gun bill passes procedural vote in US Senate

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In response to rising social anger over mass shootings at schools, grocery stores, churches, malls, sporting events and virtually every other public space in the United States, in a procedural vote on Tuesday, the Senate advanced the 80-page Bipartisan Safer Communities Act.

Leading senators have indicated that they expect the bill to clear the Senate this week, perhaps as early as Thursday, at which point it will be sent back to the House of Representatives for a vote. On Wednesday, Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi told reporters she expected that the House would pass the bill before the weekend and the two-week Fourth of July recess for Congress.

According to the Gun Violence Archive (GVA), so far this year, 20,753 people in the US have died after being shot by a firearm. Of these, nearly half, 11,418 people, used a gun to commit suicide.

There have been more mass shootings in the US this year than days on the calendar. The GVA, which defines a mass shooting as an incident in which at least four people, not including the shooter, are injured or killed, has documented 278 incidences this year. The gruesome total is nine more mass shootings than the GVA recorded in all of 2014.

In a routine report over the weekend, ABC News documented nine such incidences across the US. Shootings took place in Maryland, South Carolina, New York, Washington D.C., Florida and Texas, leaving six people dead and 42 injured.

While the bill advanced by the Senate Tuesday night is

ostensibly aimed at reducing such gun-related killings, it will have little or no impact on the epidemic of mass shootings. This bill includes none of the limited proposals advanced by President Joe Biden in a speech earlier this month, such as a ban on high-capacity magazines, a reinstatement of the 1994 assault weapons ban, or a rise in the legal age to purchase a gun.

The bill provides meager social and health care spending, such as increased “tele-health” and grants for Child Health Insurance Programs (CHIPs), but the “gun control” provisions are toothless.

The “Safer Communities Act,” unlike the 1994 Federal Assault Weapons Ban, does not restrict the sale of semi-automatic rifles, such as those used in the recent Buffalo and Uvalde massacres, or raise the age limit to purchase the high-powered weaponry.

In fact, the “gun bill,” does not include the words “gun,” “magazine,” “rifle,” “AR-15,” “M-16,” “semi-automatic,” “pistol,” “automatic,” “revolver” or “shotgun” anywhere in the text.

However, the legislation does provide hundreds of millions in additional funding to local, state and federal police, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

This, no doubt, explains the bipartisan support for the bill and the effusive praise it has received in the capitalist press, which has presented the bill as the most consequential reform on firearms in decades.

The toothless character of the legislation is evident from the support it received from a section of Republicans. Despite opposition from the powerful

National Rifle Association gun lobby, the bill advanced Tuesday night by a 64-34 margin, with 14 Republicans, including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, joining all 50 Democratic senators in overcoming the filibuster hurdle and bringing it up for a floor vote.

On Tuesday, McConnell called the bill “a commonsense package of policies that will help make these horrifying incidents less likely, while fully upholding the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens.”

Emphasizing the dearth of any “gun control” measure in the bill, McConnell added, “For years, the far left falsely claimed that Congress could only address the terrible issue of mass murders by trampling on law-abiding Americans’ constitutional rights. This bill proves that false.”

Lead Democratic Senate negotiator Chris Murphy (Connecticut), revealing the political purpose behind the measure, said it was a “breakthrough,” but “more importantly, it’s a bipartisan breakthrough.”

Murphy and the Democrats’ “bipartisan breakthrough” includes \$100,000,000 to the FBI for “salaries and expense” to meet “additional resources needs of the National Instant Criminal Background Check System.”

The system, commonly referred to as NICS, is used to screen potential buyers for previous crimes that would prevent them from owning a weapon. The bill includes for the first time a search feature that would allow NICS to have access to juvenile justice and mental health records.

It also appropriates \$1.4 billion for “state and local law enforcement assistance,” which is “to remain available until expended, for grants to be administered by the Office of Justice Programs.” The bill calls for \$280,000,000 to be spent each year on such programs.

Additionally, the bill appropriates another \$100,000,000 for “Community Oriented Policing Services,” otherwise known as the COPS program, which is also overseen by the Department of Justice. In a White House statement released this past March, Biden boasted that his budget had already more than

doubled money for the COPS hiring program.

As for funds that are in the bill but are not directly given to the police, the measure calls for \$750 million in funding for states to implement and/or bolster “red-flag” laws or extreme protection orders. These laws allow a judge to order someone to relinquish his firearm if the person is deemed a threat to himself or others. While 19 states and the District of Columbia have “red-flag” laws, 30 states do not.

The robust funding for police in the “bipartisan” bill testifies to the fact that the US government and its capitalist ruling class have no solution to the epidemic of gun violence outside of more police repression.



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