

Democrats hail “bipartisan” passage of toothless gun legislation

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On Friday, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a gun restriction bill that had been approved the previous night by the Senate. The Senate vote was 65-33, with 15 Republicans, including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, joining all 50 Democrats to overcome a filibuster and pass the measure.

The House approved the “Bipartisan Safer Communities Act” by a 234-193 margin, with 14 Republicans, including Representative Tony Gonzales, who represents Uvalde, Texas, joining all of the House Democrats. The bill now goes to President Joe Biden’s desk to be signed into law. It was passed just ahead of Congress’ two-week July 4 recess.

The bill was approved one month to the day after an 18-year-old killed 19 children and two teachers at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde. Just days before that massacre, a fascist gunman killed 10 people at a grocery store in Buffalo, New York.

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

The bill is narrower than the package pushed through the House last month, which proposed, among other reforms, raising the minimum age to purchase a semiautomatic rifle from 18 to 21 and a ban on large-capacity magazines. The Biden administration and the Democrats have dropped any effort to impose a blanket ban on the purchase of semiautomatic rifles or universal and comprehensive background checks.

The measures included in the bill were effectively dictated by the 10 Republican senators, headed by Texas Senator John Cornyn, who negotiated the legislation with 10 Democrats, headed by Connecticut Senator Chris Murphy.

A significant portion of the \$13 billion allocated for

the bill goes to bolstering local, state and federal police. This includes \$1.4 billion for “state and local law enforcement assistance” grants, calling on the Justice Department to administer \$280,000,000 in grants per year.

There is a provision incentivizing states to include mental health and juvenile records in the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), which would allow for more comprehensive background checks for those between the ages of 18 and 21.

This is accompanied by \$100,000,000 in new funds to the Federal Bureau of Investigation for “salaries and expenses” to meet the “additional resource needs” required to expand the program.

Another \$100,000,000 is appropriated for “Community-Oriented Policing Services,” also known as the COPS program, which is overseen by the Justice Department. The COPS program advances “the practice of community policing” by state and local police “through information and grant resources.” According to the COPS website, about \$14 billion has already been spent on the program since 1994.

The sections of the bill unrelated to bolstering the police provide meager social and health care spending, such as \$750 million to help states implement and run crisis intervention programs. States can use the money to implement and manage “red flag” programs, which allow a judge to order someone deemed a threat to himself or others to relinquish his firearm. The funds can also be used for other crisis intervention programs like mental health courts, drug courts and veterans courts.

Another provision closes the “boyfriend loophole” in domestic violence laws that bans anyone who is convicted of domestic abuse against a spouse or partner

with whom he shares children or cohabitates from owning firearms. The new bill bars anyone who is convicted of a domestic violence crime against someone with whom he has a “continuing serious relationship of a romantic or intimate nature” from having a gun for at least five years.

The bill includes a slight expansion of background checks, making the local juvenile records of people aged 18 to 20 available during required federal background checks. These examinations, currently limited to three days, will be expanded up to a maximum of 10 days to give officials more time to search records.

Penalties for gun trafficking will be strengthened under the bill; money will be provided for behavioral health clinics and school mental health programs; and funds are to be allocated for school safety initiatives, which will mean a further militarization of educational facilities.

Despite being touted by the media as the most substantial gun legislation in three decades, the “Bipartisan Safer Communities Act” will do little to reduce gun-related killings in the US. As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted previously, the “gun” law does not include the words “gun,” “magazine,” “rifle,” “AR-15,” “M-16,” “semi-automatic,” “pistol,” “automatic,” “revolver” or “shotgun” anywhere in the 80 pages of text.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, aware of the bill’s mainly token character, said, “As I say to members all the time with legislation, do not judge it for what isn’t in it, but respect it for what it is.”

Although the bill was opposed by the National Rifle Association, the few Republicans who voted for it were motivated by hopes of attracting more “moderate” voters the GOP will need to win control of Congress in the November elections. The Democrats are motivated by equally cynical electoral calculations.

Moreover, even the meager provisions of the bill are certain to face multiple court challenges in the aftermath of this week’s Supreme Court decision striking down a New York law that restricts an individual’s ability to carry concealed weapons.

Neither capitalist party has any solution to the epidemic of gun violence in America, which is a product of the rot and decay of American capitalism. There is no discussion in the corporate media or the

political establishment of the pathologies of American society rooted in malignant levels of social inequality, militarism and war, the promotion of anti-science and religious bigotry and the glorification of wealth.



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