

# NRA Up in Arms After U.S. Senate's Bipartisan Deal on Gun Control



The bill was watered down by some Republicans but could be passed by the end of the week.

WASHINGTON (AFP) – U.S. senators unveiled a bill Tuesday addressing the epidemic of gun violence plaguing the country as they locked down a narrow set of reforms nevertheless hailed as the first significant federal firearms controls in a generation.

The cross-party group that had been working for weeks on the wording of the legislation voiced confidence that it would have enough support on both sides of the aisle to reach President Joe Biden's desk as soon as next week.

"This bipartisan gun-safety legislation is progress and will save lives. While it is not everything we want, this legislation is urgently-needed," Democratic Senate leader Chuck Schumer said in a statement.

The lawmakers had been up against

the clock -- aware that a delay risked killing the sense of urgency ignited by the fatal shooting of 19 children in Uvalde, Texas and of 10 Black people at a supermarket in Buffalo, upstate New York, both in May.

The last significant federal gun control legislation was passed in 1994, banning the manufacture for civilian use of assault rifles and large capacity ammunition clips.

But it expired a decade later and there has been no serious effort at reform since, despite the daily average of mass shootings rising to 11 this year, according to the Gun Violence Archive.

The bipartisan group of senators agreed on a framework on June 12 that includes enhanced background checks for buyers aged under 21 and funding for mental health and school safety

programs. The blueprint also calls for funding to incentivize states to implement "red flag" laws to remove firearms from people considered a threat.

However, the U.S. National Rifle Association (NRA) announced that it opposes gun safety reforms proposed by a bipartisan group of senators, saying the new legislation will put "unnecessary burdens on the exercise of Second Amendment freedom."

The powerful gun lobby is stating on Tuesday it will back proposed legislation that will improve school safety, promote mental health services and help reduce violence.

"We will oppose this gun control legislation because it falls short at every level," the association said in its statement. "It does little to truly address violent crime while opening the door to unnecessary burdens on the exercise of Second Amendment freedom by law-abiding gun owners."

The association also noted that the bill can be abused to restrict lawful gun purchases and introduce gun control measures implemented by local and state governments, and went on to claim that the legislation will restrict "our constitutional freedoms."

"Decisions by the Supreme Court of the United States in the Heller and McDonald cases make clear that the Second Amendment is an individual constitutional freedom," the association concluded in its statement. "We will always fight for those freedoms -- and the fundamental values we have defended for over 150 years."

# Drone Crashes Into Russian Oil Refinery in Possible Attack



Russian Emergency Situation ministry's firefighters work at the scene of a fire at the Novoshakhtinsk oil processing plant in the Rostov region.

MOSCOW (Al Jazeera/Reuters) – A drone attack has hit a major Russian oil refinery near the border with Ukraine, the plant's management said, sending a ball of flame and black smoke billowing into the sky and prompting the suspension of operations.

Officials at the Novoshakhtinsk oil refinery in Russia's Rostov region said the first drone attacked at 8:40am (05:40GMT), hitting a crude distillation unit, triggering a blast and ball of fire.

The second attack, at 9:23am, targeted crude oil reservoirs at the refinery, the largest supplier of oil products in southern Russia, but caused no fire, according to plant management. No one was reported injured.

Russian regions bordering Ukraine have reported attacks and shelling after Moscow sent its troops into its neighbor on February 24 for what it still calls a "special military operation".

The refinery is in southwestern Russia, just 8km (5 miles) from the border with Ukraine.

"As a result of terrorist actions from the Western border of the Rostov region, two un-

manned aerial vehicles struck at the technological facilities of Novoshakhtinsk," a statement from the plant said.

"Staff have been evacuated and technological equipment has been stopped to assess the damage."

There was no immediate comment from Ukrainian officials on the alleged attack.

Earlier in the day, a Russian missile strike killed at least one person and damaged buildings including a school in the southern Ukrainian city of Mykolaiv, the local mayor said.

The attacks caused several fires, damaged a number of residential and business buildings and left smoke hanging over the port city, Mayor Oleksandr Senkevych said.

"I keep saying it's still dangerous in the city. Before, people were going out in droves but they go out less now," he said on national television.

Regional Governor Vitaliy Kim said earlier on Wednesday that seven missiles had hit Mykolaiv. Grain handler Viterria said its Everi terminal in Mykolaiv was on fire after being hit in an attack but that no one had been killed there.

# Climate Change Triggers Unprecedented South Asia Floods

DHAKA (AP) – Scientists say climate change is a factor behind the erratic and early rains that triggered unprecedented floods in Bangladesh and northeastern India, killing dozens and making lives miserable for millions of others.

Although the region is no stranger to flooding, it typically takes place later in the year when monsoon rains are well underway.

This year's torrential rainfall lashed the area as early as March. It may take much longer to determine the extent to which climate change played a role in the floods, but scientists say that it has made the monsoon -- a seasonable change in weather usually associated with strong rains -- more variable over the past decades. This means that much of the rain expected to fall in a year is arriving in a space of weeks.

The northeastern Indian state of Meghalaya received nearly three times its average June rainfall in just the first three weeks of the month, and neighboring Assam received twice its monthly average in the same period. Several rivers, including one of Asia's largest, flow downstream from the two states into the Bay of Bengal in low-lying Bangladesh, a densely populated delta nation.

With more rainfall predicted over the next five days, Bangladesh's

Flood Forecast and Warning Centre warned Tuesday that water levels would remain dangerously high in the country's northern regions.

The pattern of monsoons, vital for the agrarian economies of India and Bangladesh, has been shifting since the 1950s, with longer dry spells interspersed with heavy rain, said Roxy Matthew Koll, a climate scientist at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology in Pune, adding that extreme rainfall events were also projected to increase.

Until now, floods in northwestern Bangladesh were rare while Assam state, famed for its tea cultivation, usually coped with floods later in the year during the usual monsoon season. The sheer volume of early rain this year that lashed the region in just a few weeks makes the current floods an "unprecedented" situation, said Anjal Prakash, a research director at India's Bharti Institute of Public Policy, who has contributed to UN-sponsored study on global warming.

"This is something that we have never heard of and never seen," he said.

Hundreds of thousands are displaced and millions in the region have been forced to scramble to makeshift evacuation centers.

The country of 160 million is considered one of the most vulnerable to climate change and the poor are disproportionately impacted.

# Thousands of Dutch Farmers Protest Against Emissions Targets



Tractors on the A1 highway between Apeldoorn and Stroe, the Netherlands

AMSTERDAM (Al Jazeera) – Thousands of farmers have gathered in the central Netherlands to protest against the Dutch government's plans to cut in emissions of nitrogen oxide and ammonia, driving their tractors across the Netherlands and snarling traffic on major highways.

Wednesday's protest was organized earlier this month after the government published nationwide targets for reducing emissions, sparking anger from farmers who claim their livelihoods -- and those of thousands of people who work in the agricultural service industry -- are on the line.

Calling it an "unavoidable transition", the government man-

dated reductions in emissions of up to 70 percent in many places close to protected nature areas and as high as 95 percent in other places.

The government has been forced to act after courts in recent years began blocking permits for infrastructure and housing projects because the country was missing its emissions targets.

By early afternoon, many protesting farmers had arrived at a green field in the small agricultural village of Stroe, about 70km (45 miles) east of the capital, Amsterdam, where a stage was set up for speakers to address the crowd and music blared out of speakers while children bounced in a giant

inflatable pig. Farmers hooted their tractors' horns as they drove onto the field, where a banner on a truck read, in Dutch: "What The Hague chooses is deeply sad for the farmer", a reference to lawmakers in the city that houses the Netherlands' parliament.

Another banner on a tractor said: "We can no longer be stopped."

The national infrastructure authority urged motorists to delay travel as slow-moving convoys of tractors defied appeals not to use highways as they drove towards the demonstration.

In The Hague, a few dozen farmers and their supporters, some wearing T-shirts with the text "No farmers, no food", gathered for a breakfast on Wednesday morning before heading to the protest.

"This is where the rules are made," said dairy farmer Jaap Zegwaard, who parked his tractor on the edge of a park in the city. "I was asked to come here and provide breakfast so we can show we are food producers, not pollution producers."

The ruling coalition has earmarked an extra 24.3 billion euros (\$25.6bn) to finance changes that will likely make many farmers drastically reduce their number of livestock or get rid of them altogether.

# No Solution in Sight as Macron Struggles to Break Impasse

PARIS (AFP) – French President Emmanuel Macron pressed on with efforts Wednesday to end the crisis created by his failure to retain a parliamentary majority but with no solution in sight to an impasse that jeopardizes his plans.

Macron's centrist alliance finished Sunday's parliamentary elections 44 seats short of a majority in the National Assembly, as a new left-wing coalition and the far-right made major gains.

The situation has called into question Macron's plans for reform in his second term after his April presidential re-election -- including a key measure to reduce the retirement age -- and risks denting his international stature.

On Tuesday, Macron hosted rare talks at the Elysee Palace with opposition leaders, including the head of the far-right National Rally (RN) Marine Le Pen, to find a way out of the crisis.

He will meet other leaders, though the head of the left-wing NUPES alliance, hard-leftist Jean-Luc Melenchon is sending MP Adrien Quatennens, 32, to represent him in a clear snub to the president.

The meetings so far appear to have made little headway, and Macron has also rejected an offer from under-fire PM Elisabeth Borne to resign.

"The unfindable compromise? Emmanuel Macron is trying to regain the initiative but no consensus has been found," said the right-wing Le Figaro daily.

Analysts have said the most viable solution would be a deal between Macron's centrist alliance and the right-wing Republicans (LR), a party on the decline but which still won 61 seats.

But after talks with Macron on Tuesday, LR leader Christian Jacob ruled out any kind of "pact" with Macron's Together alliance.

Former prime minister Edouard Philippe, whose Horizons party is part of Macron's alliance, told BFM television late Tuesday that a "grand coalition" should now be formed.

"We need to hear what the voters have said and take them seriously," he said.

Macron has remained characteristically remote, not making any public comment so far on what commentators see as one of the biggest setbacks of his political career.



WASHINGTON (The Hill) – Former U.S. president Donald Trump's campaign to press GOP state officials to overturn the results of the 2020 election violated state laws, defied the constitution and led directly to violent threats that continue to this day, a number of Republicans testified on Capitol Hill Tuesday. Appearing before the House committee investigating last year's attack on the Capitol, the Republican election officials said Trump's team, led by the president himself, made fantastic allegations of voter fraud -- all of them false -- and asked numerous state figures to break the law to keep Trump in power despite his clear defeat, The Hill reported. "The numbers are the numbers and the numbers don't lie," said Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, whom Trump had pressed to "find" 11,780 votes -- the number that would have made him the winner in that state. Raffensperger noted that three separate recount efforts in the Peach State all found Joe Biden to be the winner by a "remarkably" similar margin. "What I knew is we didn't have any votes to find," he said. Their testimony provided the latest affirmation of the select committee's central accusation against the former president: Trump had abused the powers of the White House to promote a lie -- that the election was stolen -- and nullify the wishes of voters in several key states where the margins were slimmest. It was that campaign, in the committee's telling, that led directly to the violence at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

MOSCOW (Reuters) – Russia on Wednesday said the West was spreading lies about the causes of the global food crisis which Moscow said was being stoked by the sanctions imposed on Russia by the United States and European Union. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told reporters in Moscow she was dismayed by repeated Western statements that Russia was to blame for the global food crisis. "It is a lie -- such accusations are complete lies," Zakharova said. "So the West can supply all these arms to Ukraine but for some reason nothing can be taken out of Ukraine?" The United States and European Union members, which are supplying arms to Ukraine, have accused Russia of stoking a food crisis by preventing grain exports from Ukraine -- which accounts for about one tenth of global wheat exports. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy warned on June 9 that millions of people could starve because of a Russian blockade of Ukraine's Black Sea ports which he said had left the world "on the brink of a terrible food crisis". "It is illogical -- on the one hand the European Union... says a threat to global food security is being created but at the same time they block the delivery routes of goods to themselves on their own continent," Zakharova said.

COLOMBO (AP) – Sri Lanka's debt-laden economy has "collapsed" after months of shortages of food, fuel and electricity, its prime minister told lawmakers Wednesday, in comments underscoring the country's dire situation as it seeks help from international lenders. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe told Parliament the South Asian country is "facing a far more serious situation beyond the mere shortages of fuel, gas, electricity and food. Our economy has completely collapsed." While Sri Lanka's crisis is considered its worst in recent memory, Wickremesinghe's assertion that the economy has collapsed did not cite any specific new developments. It appeared intended to emphasize to his critics and opposition lawmakers that he has inherited a difficult task that can't be fixed quickly, as the economy founders under the weight of heavy debts, lost tourism revenue and other impacts from the pandemic, as well as surging costs for commodities. Lawmakers of the country's two main opposition parties are boycotting Parliament this week to protest against Wickremesinghe, who became prime minister just over a month ago and is also finance minister, for not having delivered on his pledges to turn the economy around.

MADRID (AP) – Extended drought conditions in several Mediterranean countries, a heat wave last week that reached northern Germany and high fuel costs for aircraft needed to fight wildfires have heightened concerns across Europe this summer. "Much of the continent is in drought," said Cathelijne Stoof, an environmental science professor at the Netherlands' Wageningen University, who called the wildfire outlook "very challenging across Europe." Fires last summer blackened more than 11,000 square kilometers (4,250 square miles) of land -- an area more than four times the size of Luxembourg. About half of the damage was in the European Union. And, experts say, Europe's wildfires aren't just a problem for the southern, hotter countries. "What scientists are warning us is that (fires) are obviously going north and in countries such as the UK, in countries such as Germany as well as in Scandinavian countries, in the future, we need to expect wildfires to happen more often," said Catherine Gamper, a climate change adaptation specialist at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Wildfires across Spain have destroyed tens of thousands of acres of wooded land, though a recent sharp drop in temperatures is helping firefighters contain them.

LONDON (The Independent) – Asylum seekers detained for removal to Rwanda weeks ago are still being held in detention despite the last-minute grounding of the flight, which legal experts say leaves the government "wide-open" to litigation and aggravated damages claims. Ministers have been accused of subjecting vulnerable people to a "cruel experiment" after it emerged that the vast majority of people who the Home Office had hoped to deport to East Africa -- most of whom were not even given tickets for the flight -- remain locked up. This is despite the fact that there is no further flight planned at this stage, meaning there is no "imminent prospect of removal", which lawyers say makes their continued detention potentially unlawful.