



# Political Sins, More Than Guns, Drove Colorado Recall

*By David Kopel Sep 12, 2013*

The [Colorado](#) vote to [recall](#) two Democratic state senators is a major win for the Second Amendment and for responsible law-making. Although guns were the reason for the recall campaign, Senate President John Morse of [Colorado Springs](#) and Senator Angela Giron of Pueblo lost primarily because they misused their powers, not for any stand on principle. Their misjudgments may mean the end of the state's new gun control laws.

As of today, those laws are still on the books. The Senate used to be split 20-15 with a Democratic majority. The majority is now reduced to 18-17. More important, because the Senate's two pro-Second Amendment Democrats voted against it, the [magazine ban](#) passed by only a single vote. After the recall, the Colorado Senate has a pro-Second Amendment majority -- enough to repeal the ban on magazines holding more than 15 rounds.

In the state's House of Representatives, there may already be a majority for repeal. The magazine ban passed the House in February by only three votes, and by March widespread buyer's remorse had spread among Democrats who voted in favor of the ban. That's a reason the bill's managers couldn't let the bill go back to the House for amendments, even after it became clear that the bill had major drafting defects.

The bill only passed the House in the first place because Vice President [Joe Biden](#) called undecided state Democratic representatives and essentially ordered them to vote for it. After this week's recall, White House promises of electoral protection for legislators who vote against guns no longer have credibility.

## Governor Weakened

There's no expectation that Governor John Hickenlooper would sign a bill repealing the law. But he might not be governor for a lot longer. His [approval ratings](#) are underwater with 48 percent of voters saying he shouldn't be re-elected in 2014. One big reason for Hickenlooper's lackluster polling numbers is his stance on guns; Coloradoans disapprove of his handling of the issue by 17 points.

Hickenlooper made the situation worse in August by [blocking](#) the execution of Nathan Dunlap, who killed four people during a 1993 robbery of a Chuck E. Cheese restaurant.

For some Coloradoans, it was galling to see Hickenlooper thwart justice for a heinous gun criminal while cracking down on law-abiding gun owners. The governor retains strong support among Democrats, but his approval rating has plunged among a plurality of Republicans. Hickenlooper is also underwater with independents.

After the vote this week, Hickenlooper said, “Obviously I’ll have to do a better job of getting the facts out there” about the gun control bills. The voters’ message, however, wasn’t that gun control advocates don’t talk enough. The problem was how little they listened during the legislative process.

In the last half-century, the Colorado legislative leader who had been the most notorious for abusing the rights of the minority party, and for bullying dissidents in his own party, was Republican [Carl Beverly Bledsoe](#), who was speaker of the House from 1981 to 1991. Things became so bad that Colorado voters in 1988 took the extraordinary step of adopting a constitutional amendment to reform the legislative system, curbing Bledsoe’s power.

The only legislative leader in the last half-century who may have exceeded Bledsoe’s abuses of power was Senate President Morse in 2013. As with Bledsoe, Colorado voters ultimately decided they needed to take special action.

## Flawed Legislation

Morse, who was elected Senate president by his party’s left wing, treated moderate Democrats almost as badly as he treated Republicans. As with the gun legislation, he rammed complex bills on education finance, wind-power mandates and election law revisions through the Senate so quickly that errors were often overlooked. Later, when the mistakes became obvious, corrections weren’t allowed. Senator Giron was a reliable supporter of Morse, and he appointed her to be chairman the State Affairs Committee.

The Colorado Legislature has a long-standing tradition of allowing every citizen who wishes to testify the [opportunity to be heard](#), at least briefly. Legislators have endured many long committee hearings listening to citizens argue for and against gay rights, motorcycle-helmet mandates, immigration and other hot topics.

During the gun bill hearings this year, Giron followed Morse’s orders to limit testimony to 90 minutes per side. Hundreds of Colorado residents, some of whom had driven hours to get to Denver, were turned away.

Back home in Pueblo (where the Democratic sheriff was among the opponents of the gun bills), Giron compounded the problem -- declaring that because she had taken questions about guns at one town-hall meeting, she didn’t want to talk about the subject at any other town halls. Giron’s district has a 24-point Democratic advantage among registered

voters and voted for President [Barack Obama](#) by a 19-point margin in 2012. She was ousted this week by 12 points.

The recall of Giron and Morse was partly a repudiation of substance of the gun laws, but more so, it was a rejection of their political high-handedness. In Colorado, and elsewhere in the U.S., the process matters -- even, or especially, if you disagree on principles.

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