

## **Trump vows progress will be made on regulatory ban of bump stocks**

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U.S. President Donald Trump is vowing to move forward on a long-delayed ban on bump stocks, amid mounting pressure to tackle the United States' epidemic of mass shootings following the deaths of 17 people at a Florida high-school last week.

Mr. Trump announced on Tuesday that Attorney-General Jeff Sessions would draft a law to prohibit devices that, when attached to semi-automatic weapons, can make the guns fire a continuous stream of bullets like an automatic.

The White House said last October that the administration would consider whether bump stocks were legal, after Stephen Paddock used the device when he gunned down 58 people at a country music concert on the Las Vegas strip. For months, the matter was said to be under review. Now, Mr. Trump said, the administration would start looking at how to prohibit the stocks.

"Just a few moments ago, I signed a memorandum directing the Attorney-General to propose regulations to ban all devices that turn legal weapons into machine guns," Mr. Trump told a Medal of Valor ceremony in the East Room of the White House. "I expect that these critical regulations will be finalized, Jeff, very soon."

The memo did not set a timeline for the regulations to be proposed or put into practice.

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Tuesday he had signed a memorandum directing the attorney-general to draw up regulations banning devices that turn firearms into machine guns, like the bump stock used in October's mass shooting in Las Vegas.

Survivors of last Wednesday's massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., have reinvigorated the movement for gun control in the United States. The country has both a high rate of gun-related homicides for a developed country – nearly six times that of Canada – and a disproportionate number of mass shootings.

Busloads of students descended on the state capital of Tallahassee on Tuesday as the lower house of the legislature voted down an attempt by a Democratic lawmaker to ban assault rifles such as the one that Nikolas Cruz is alleged to have used in the shooting. Undeterred, more students continued arriving through the day to turn the heat up on legislators. They are also planning a March 24 protest in Washington, dubbed the March For Our Lives.

"If the President wants to come up to me and tell me to my face that it was a terrible tragedy and it should never have happened ... I'm going to happily ask him how much money he received from the National Rifle Association," one survivor, Emma Gonzalez, told a rally in Florida over the weekend.

The students' efforts received some high-powered backing on Tuesday, with actor George Clooney and his wife, human-rights lawyer Amal Clooney, donating US\$500,000 to their efforts. Several other entertainment figures – including movie producer Steven Spielberg and talk show host Oprah Winfrey – matched the Clooneys' contribution.

"These inspiring young people remind me of the Freedom Riders of the 60s who also said we've had ENOUGH and our voices will be heard," Ms. Winfrey wrote on Twitter, referencing students of different races who rode buses together in the South to challenge segregationist laws.

The students appear to have public opinion on their side: A poll for The Washington Post and ABC News found 77 per cent of respondents said Congress was not doing enough to stop mass shootings. While members of Congress have repeatedly tabled bills meant to tighten U.S. gun-control laws – such as by banning assault weapons or requiring background checks for weapons purchased at gun shows – these efforts have gone nowhere.

Legislators in favour of gun control took heart from the demands for action and said they would try again. Senator Pat Toomey told the Post on Tuesday he would try again to tighten background checks after a previous bill came to naught.

"It does feel like we have a shot at getting a little bit of momentum on background checks," he told the Post. "We're going to take a swing at that and I'm hoping we'll be able to do it."

David Kopel, an expert in gun policy at the libertarian Cato Institute, said it would be better if Congress banned bump stocks by statute rather than leaving it to a regulatory process. By writing a law, legislators could close a loophole in the existing legal language that draws a distinction between a true automatic weapon and one that simply performs like one without being technically automatic.

While a bump stock ban would be a fairly narrow measure – blocking a single accessory while leaving assault rifles such as the one that Mr. Cruz is alleged to have used in Florida legal – Mr. Kopel said it is a significant step.

Mr. Kopel took Mr. Trump at face value in his desire to ban the devices.

"This has been in progress since last October," he said. "This is a 'hurry up and do what I told you to do' order."

