



## US gun control: Connecticut backs tough new law

By: Susan Haigh – April 4, 2013

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THE US state where a gunman killed 20 children and six teachers in December last year has passed a package of gun control measures which supporters claim will be the most comprehensive seen in America.

Connecticut's legislators expanded a ban on assault weapons, introduced background checks for all firearms sales and outlawed the sale or purchase of ammunition magazines holding more than ten rounds.

Democrat governor Dannel Malloy has already said he will sign the measures into law.

"I think you can make an argument, a strong argument, this is the toughest law passed anywhere in the country," he said.

Gun rights advocates questioned whether the legislation would have done anything to stop Adam Lanza, the 20-year-old who blasted his way in to the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown on 14 December after killing his mother Nancy. He then killed himself.

"If the legislation did something to prevent this incident, where the fault lies with the individual and the mother, not with the legitimate gun owners in this state, then we could probably support something," said Robert Crook, executive director of the Coalition of Connecticut Sportsmen.

Such shootings have sparked a growing divide in the US, as President Barack Obama champions more gun control and the powerful National Rifle Association gun lobby maintains that more guns keep people safer. It has succeeded in blocking many efforts to impose stricter gun control, citing the right to bear arms enshrined in the US - constitution.

No major gun legislation has passed the US Congress since 1994.

With Congress due to return to Washington after a two-week Easter holiday break, Mr Obama has been scheduling high-profile events on gun legislation to push federal legislators and sustain a drive for some kind of action aimed at curbing gun violence.

Last week, he called for legislation while flanked by 21 mothers who have lost children to gun violence. "I haven't forgotten those kids," he declared then. But with just days left before the Senate begins its debate, there are signs that sweeping congressional efforts to address gun violence have flagged.

A proposed ban on assault weapons has little hope of being passed and the prospects for outlawing large-capacity ammunition magazines are poor. Key senators have been unable to reach a bipartisan compromise that would require federal background checks for gun transactions between private individuals. Federal background checks presently apply only to sales by licensed gun dealers.

Colorado has already expanded its gun control laws despite being a state where gun ownership is rife. The state was also the site of a mass shooting, in which 12 people were killed at a cinema during a midnight screening of the latest Batman movie last July.

But its move goes against a wider trend.

While in more liberal states with large urban centres such as New York and California, legislators have been introducing stricter gun control laws, more conservative, rural areas in the American heartland have been going in the opposite direction.

South Dakota last Friday passed a law allowing staff to carry firearms in state schools.

In the Maine town of Byron, councillors took police advice and voted last week not to send a similar mandatory gun ownership proposal to voters. The idea has also been promoted in Nelson, Georgia, where supporters of a gun-ownership proposal say light police patrols leave residents unprotected.

### **‘States with weakest gun laws suffer worst rates of shooting deaths’**

US states with the weakest gun laws have the worst rates of gun violence, ranking high on numerous indicators, such as gun homicides and suicides, firearm deaths of children, and killings of police officers, according to a new report.

Alaska ranked first for gun deaths, the Centre for American Progress found, with 20.28 deaths per 100,000 people in 2010 – more than twice the US average – followed by Louisiana and Montana, all states prior analyses have judged to have weak gun laws. Eight of the states with the highest levels of gun violence were among the 25 with the weakest gun laws.

The report is the second in recent weeks to link US gun deaths and firearms laws. Last month, Boston researchers reported the gun death rate varied inversely with the level of gun controls in each state.

Deborah Azrael, a research scientist at Harvard’s School of Public Health, said the report “reinforces what we know from other studies, which is that the rate of exposure to firearms is associated with overall mortality”. But the report was criticised by opponents of tighter gun laws. They claim gun ownership cuts overall crime. “The real world experience of guns obviously is that they are harmful in the wrong hands and protective in the right hands,” said David Kopel, an assistant policy analyst at the Cato Institute. “So you want to look at both effects.”

