



They said it couldn't be done

Nevada's Democratic-led Legislature

exerted its majority party power last week by introducing, hearing and passing a gun safety measure, Senate Bill 143, in just a few days. The bill implements the 2016 voter-approved initiative to require background checks for nearly all private gun sales, including those at Nevada's omnipresent gun shows, a loophole that has allowed thousands of guns to be sold without the scrutiny buyers would face if they bought their weapons from a federally-licensed gun dealer.

The Sandoval/Laxalt administration refused to implement the measure when the FBI declined to provide the background checks specified by the initiative since Nevada uses its own broader method of conducting background checks for guns purchased through dealers. The measure was unpopular in rural Republican Nevada, so there was no political cost to ignoring the voters and letting the initiative wither.

Democrats promised to fix the problem during the 2018 campaign, and, last week,

they unveiled their solution by introducing SB 143. But instead of sending the bill through the normal hearing process, they put it on a lightning-fast track, with the goal of approving it in time for the one-year anniversary of the tragic Parkland shooting. Given the intense national craving for progress on gun safety measures, the symbolism was understandable and poignant, but the fast-tracking of the bill fed conspiracy theories from Nevada's already paranoid 2nd Amendment crowd, convinced the Democrats were angling to take away their gun rights, install a universal gun registry, or otherwise threaten their prized gun culture.

When the National Rifle Association got wind of the upcoming hearing, they launched into full attack mode, beginning with a breathless tweet of alarm, accompanied by a picture of the Hawaii legislative building. You'd think the palm trees would have been an obvious clue they had the wrong photo, especially in February when our capitol was buried in snow, but you can almost hear the thought process of their

out-of-state social media person—*Nevada Legislature, Las Vegas, palm trees, this must be it*. The gaffe was humorous, but the NRA wasn't kidding around. Their panicked message sent hundreds of opposition calls to the Legislature before the bill was even introduced.

The joint hearing of the Assembly and Senate Judiciary Committees attracted ardent supporters from both sides—grizzled, older Nevadans and younger, vibrant Moms Demand Action ladies, clothed in bright red t-shirts. Nevada's governor and attorney general testified in support of the measure, another sign of its popularity with Democratic base voters.

There was no real urgency to expedite the bill, since it won't take effect until January of 2020 when the three-year timeline prohibiting changes to the original initiative ends, but Democrats succumbed to the political optics of the Parkland anniversary and the opportunity to showcase their ability to move legislation quickly and address pent-up demand for gun

safety reform. There are often mistakes made in "ram and jam" bills that don't have enough careful review during the legislative process. Hopefully that won't be the case this time.

Despite the needless rush to pass the bill, it's good to see Nevada act, although other states have passed bolder initiatives, such as Washington's plan to raise the minimum age for buying semi-automatic rifles from 18 to 21 and enact stronger gun storage requirements.

No one is under the illusion that SB 143 will prevent all gun violence, accidental gun deaths and suicide by firearms. But closing the gun show loophole is an obvious place to start exercising a little control over the reckless gun culture in Nevada, which allows people who wouldn't pass a background check to mosey on down to their local gun show and buy whatever they please. If some people are inconvenienced a bit, that's a small price to pay for our collective safety. □

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