

TRUMP SUPPORTS GUN BACKGROUND CHECKS

WEST PALM BEACH (AP) — From the confines of his golf club, US President Donald Trump offered support for a limited strengthening of federal background checks on gun purchases Monday while staying largely mum in the last few days about the victims of the Florida school massacre and the escalating debate about controls on weapons.

One side of that debate was represented outside the White House as dozens of teens spread their bodies across the pavement to symbolize the dead and call for stronger gun controls, a precursor to a march in Washington planned next month by survivors of the Parkland school shooting and supporters of their cause.

At his Florida club just 40 miles from a community ravaged by the shooting that left 17 dead last week, Trump gave a nod toward a specific policy action, with the White House saying he had spoken Friday to Sen. John Cornyn, a Texas Republican, about a bipartisan bill designed to strengthen the FBI database of prohibited gun buyers.

Spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders qualified the support, stressing that talks

continue and "revisions are being considered," but said "the president is supportive of efforts to improve the federal background check system."

The main action Trump has taken on guns in office has been to sign a resolution blocking an Obama-era rule designed to keep guns out of the hands of certain mentally disabled people.

The president has voiced strong support for gun rights and the National Rifle Association.

The bipartisan background check legislation would be aimed at ensuring that federal agencies and states accurately report relevant criminal information to the FBI. It was introduced after the Air Force failed to report the criminal history of the gunman

who slaughtered more than two dozen people at a Texas church.

The White House statement comes as shooting survivors and other young people press for more gun control in a rising chorus of grief and activism. Their "March for Our Lives" is planned March 24 in Washington.

Ella Fesler, 16-year-old high school student in Alexandria, Virginia, was among the students at the "lie-in" in front of the White House. She said it was time for change, adding: "Every day when I say 'bye' to my parents, I do acknowledge the fact that I could never see my parents again."

But previous gun tragedies have not produced action in Congress. After the Las Vegas massacre in the fall, Republicans and Democrats in Congress talked about taking a rare step to tighten the nation's gun laws. Four months later, the only gun legislation that has moved in the House or Senate instead eases restrictions for gun owners.

Kristin Brown, co-president of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, said the measure Trump discussed with Cornyn would help to enforce existing rules, but would not close loopholes permitting loose private sales on the Internet and at gun shows. She's pressing for a ban on assault-type weapons and for laws enabling family members, guardians or police to ask judges to strip gun rights temporarily from people who show warning signs of violence.

"We need a comprehensive system," Brown said. "One of these isn't enough."

Trump, who visited first responders and some victims Friday, has focused his comments on mental health, rather than guns. The White House says the president will host a "listening session" with students and teachers this week and will discuss school safety with state and local officials. But they have offered no further details on who will attend those sessions.

* foreign news

* Trump, Donald - U.S. President