

Trump considers arming teachers

WASHINGTON (Reuters) — Students galvanized by the deadly mass shooting at a Florida high school confronted lawmakers on Wednesday with demands to restrict sales of assault rifles, while US President Donald Trump suggested arming teachers as a way to stop more US rampages.

The unprecedented lobbying effort by groups of teenagers and parents at the White House and at the Florida statehouse in Tallahassee played out as fellow students staged classroom walkouts and rallies in cities across the country.

Trump held an emotional, hour-long meeting with students who survived the Florida shooting and a parent whose child did not. He said arming teachers and other school staff could help prevent future mass shootings, voicing support for an idea backed by the powerful National Rifle Association gun lobby.

The Republican president, who has championed gun rights and was endorsed by

the NRA during the 2016 campaign, said he would move quickly to tighten background checks for gun buyers and would consider raising the age for buying certain types of guns.

The attack at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, where 17 students and educators were killed on Feb. 14 in the second-

deadliest shooting at a US public school, has revived the long-running US debate over gun rights.

Investigators said the assault was carried out by 19-year-old former Stoneman Douglas student Nikolas Cruz, who purchased an AR-15-style assault weapon nearly a year ago.

"Nikolas Cruz was able to purchase an assault rifle before he was able to buy a beer," said Stoneman Douglas student Lorenzo Prado, referring to a Florida law that allows people as young as 18 to buy assault weapons.

"The laws of the country have failed," he told reporters at the Florida state capital.

Lawmakers in Tallahassee said they would consider raising the age limit to 21, the same standard for handguns and alcohol, although the state Senate opted on Wednesday not to take up a gun control measure.

The US Constitution protects the right of Americans to bear arms, a measure fiercely defended by Republicans. However, Trump has come under pressure to act.

Trump spoke at length during the televised White House "listening session," attended by students, parents and people affected by other US school

shootings, about how armed teachers and security guards could frighten off potential shooters and prevent more deaths.

"If you had a teacher ... who was adept at firearms, they could very well end the attack very quickly," he said, while acknowledging the proposal was controversial. Some of the meeting participants indicated support. Others were opposed.

Mark Barden, whose son was killed in the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Connecticut, said his wife Jackie, a teacher "will tell you that school teachers have more than enough responsibilities right now than to have the awesome responsibility of lethal force to take a life."

A task force backed by the NRA recommended more armed guards and teachers in schools after the Sandy Hook shooting.

* TRUMP, DONALD - US PRES.

* TEACHERS