

Two state senators recalled after stiffening Colorado's gun control laws

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Voters line up to receive their ballots for a recall vote for Democratic state Sen. Angela Giron, in Pueblo, Colo., Sept. 10, 2013. Giron and Senate President John Morse were both voted out in what became a national debate on gun control laws. Photo: AP/Brennan Linsley

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — Colorado voters ousted two state lawmakers who helped stiffen the state's gun laws in a recall vote that turned into a nationally watched debate on gun control.

Colorado Senate President John Morse and state Senator Angela Giron were vital figures in turning the strict gun legislation into law. Earlier in the year, opponents of these restrictions campaigned to have Democrats Morse and Giron removed from office. By June, they had collected enough signatures to force the recall vote, which was held on Tuesday.

Morse was defeated by 51 percent against him to 49 percent in his favor, while Giron lost 56 percent to 44 percent. They will both now be replaced by Republicans who opposed the gun restrictions. Colorado Springs City Councilman Bernie Herpin will take Morse's job and former Pueblo Deputy Chief of Police George Rivera will take Giron's seat.

The vote was historic because it was the first time ever that Colorado legislators were successfully recalled. Morse and Giron helped pass sweeping gun control measures last winter after several mass shootings in 2012. These included a school in Newtown, Conn., and a movie theater in Aurora, outside Denver. Colorado was also the scene of the Columbine High School massacre in April 1999.

Gun Laws Remain In Force Despite Recall

The new Colorado laws limit gun magazines to 15 rounds and require universal background checks, among other restrictions. But they were passed without a single Republican vote, and some gun owners felt that their opinions had been ignored. The laws, which took effect July 1, remain in force in the state despite Tuesday's vote.

After losing the vote, Morse thanked voters for the chance to serve them. He said, "The Democratic Party will continue to fight." Morse then told his supporters that the "highest rank in a democracy is citizen, not Senate president. There's nothing citizens can't accomplish when they put their minds to it."

He continued, "We made Colorado safer from gun violence." He added that losing his job was worth the sacrifice to achieve this. "If it cost me my political career, that's a small price to pay," Morse said.

Giron told her supporters that "this will make us stronger." The former senator said that she had no regrets about voting for the stricter gun laws. "I'm a fighter," she said. "We will win in the end, because we are on the right side."

These results could resonate well beyond the Rockies. Both sides of the gun debate invested heavily in the campaign, knowing that the outcome of the vote would send a message to the rest of the country.

Fight Gains National Attention

Morse had said that the restrictions were a measured, common-sense response to gun violence in a state with a long and important tradition of gun ownership.

But his critics claimed the legislation damaged personal freedoms and accused Morse of pushing it through without enough public views on the matter. Grass-roots activists launched the recall effort even before the new law was actually signed.

What began as a local effort, however, quickly gained national attention. Advocates on both sides of the gun control debate hoped to either frighten or strengthen lawmakers nationwide who might be considering similar laws.

On one side, the National Rifle Association and its allies supported the recall of the politicians. Against them was New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg who runs a group called Mayors Against Illegal Guns.

Both sides poured hundreds of thousands of dollars into their efforts and campaigned fiercely in the days leading up to the vote. *The Denver Post* reported last week that the NRA spent \$361,703 in its campaign to recall Morse and Giron. The same newspaper said in August that Bloomberg had donated \$350,000 in support of the senators.

Colorado Gun Laws Safe, For Now

Groups with other political interests invested heavily as well. These included organized labor, Planned Parenthood and the conservative Koch brothers, turning the contest into an intense debate in Colorado and across the United States.

With the replacement of Morse and Giron by Republicans, the Democratic hold on the Colorado state Senate has shrunk to just one seat. The party has a much larger majority in the state House, enough to block any legislative effort to overturn the gun laws.

Gun control opponents are hoping to get another proposal on the ballot in 2014 that would repeal some of the provisions. A group of sheriffs has also filed a lawsuit to overturn the legislation.

The results of Tuesday's vote pushed forward Morse's retirement date. He was first elected in 2006. Term limits would have meant he would have been done with the office in 2014. Giron, a freshman lawmaker on the other hand, would have faced re-election in 2014. Both now need to find new jobs, but they say they will keep on fighting. Their victorious opponents promised the same.

Quiz

- 1 Which option BEST summarizes the section "Fight Gains National Attention"?
- (A) The new gun laws involved an expenditure of thousands of dollars for campaigning against and in favor of the laws by NRA and Bloomberg respectively.
 - (B) The gun laws, which were supported by a few and criticized by the others, got national attention with huge amounts spent on campaigning for and against the laws.
 - (C) Morse, who backed his decision to change the gun laws with previous violence cases in the state, confronted a recall effort by the grass-roots activists even before the new law was actually signed.
 - (D) The conflicting gun laws, which obtained national attention, were opposed by the NRA, and supported by the New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg who runs a group named "Mayors Against Illegal Guns."
- 2 What is the MAIN idea of the section "Colorado Gun Laws Safe, For Now"?
- (A) With the intervention of groups with other political motives, the issue caught fire and spread all across the United States and a change in laws is expected in the ballot of 2014.
 - (B) Democrats, who have a hold over the state House, have enough power to block any efforts to change the gun laws.
 - (C) Morse, whose retirement date has been pushed forward, will need to find a new job, but he feels that he will continue to fight.
 - (D) The replacement of Morse and Giron by the Republicans has caused the Democratic Party to lose its hold on the Colorado state Senate.
- 3 Stricter gun laws remain in force even after the removal of Morse and Giron. Which of the following is the MOST likely reason for this?
- (A) The laws have a large number of supporters.
 - (B) The laws have kept gun-related violence in check.
 - (C) The Republican Party is still trying to revoke the laws.
 - (D) The Democratic Party has a stronghold in the state House.

- 4 How does the section "Fight Gains National Attention" discuss the gravity of the gun debate?
- (A) by highlighting how the debate will decide the existence of such laws in other states
 - (B) by highlighting how various organizations have taken sides in the debate
 - (C) by highlighting how gun ownership in Colorado has led to violence
 - (D) by highlighting the amount of money spent on the debate