

International

Thousands to march in US gun protests, but will they vote?

'March for Our Lives' tomorrow

WASHINGTON: As hundreds of thousands of young people protest for stricter gun laws at "March For Our Lives" demonstrations across the United States tomorrow, the Democratic Party and nonpartisan groups plan to register first-time voters.

That could be the easy part. The hard part will be ensuring that they go to the polls in November to vote in midterm congressional elections. "It's on us," said Sabrina Singh, a spokeswoman for the Democratic National Committee. "We have to make sure that even after young people march across the country, they take time to vote, to register and to actually turn out to do it." Organizers of the voter registration drive hope to sign up at least 25,000 people at more than 800 marches, a potentially big boost for Democrats who generally favor more stringent gun control, including over sales of assault-type weapons, bump stocks that allow semiautomatics to fire like automatic weapons, and tighter access to guns by young people and people who are mentally ill.

In America's history of mass murders involving firearms, the February massacre of 17 students and staff at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida has had at least one unusual outcome: it has prompted students to take a high-profile stand on gun control.

Their public statements, organized protests and upcoming marches planned for 80 US cities have cast partisan politics over US gun laws in a harsh light. They have also sent a message to

Washington that many students are eligible to vote this year and more future voters are right behind them. "March For Our Lives might just be the largest audience of exclusively first-time voters anywhere," said Tappan Vickery, a volunteer with the nonprofit voter registration group, Head-Count.

Vickery has a team of nearly 5,000 volunteers mobilized to sign up first-time voters in 30 cities tomorrow. "There are 4 million Americans who are turning 18 this year. Match that with the good deal of 19- to 21-year-olds who have never registered to vote. We're looking at a sum that is one massive number of prospects nationwide," said the group's spokesman and mobilization trainer Aaron Ghitelman.

Other groups with plans to register voters on Saturday include Everytown for Gun Safety, NextGen and Giffords, named for former U.S. Representative Gabby Giffords, who was shot in the head in an attempted assassination in 2011.

Participation in US elections by young voters is often low. A Reuters/Ipsos poll released on Monday showed that 64 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds said they would vote on Nov. 6; 27 percent said they would not. Nine percent said they were uncertain or declined to answer.

"The trend among young, first-time voters in midterm elections has never been anything great," said Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, director of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Jonathan M. Tisch



ARKLAND, FL: Angelina Lazo, a senior at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, is hugged as she is overcome with emotion during a rally for those heading to the March for Our Lives event in Washington D.C. in Parkland, Florida. — AFP

College of Civic Life at Tufts University.

"The turnout has been steadily declining since 2014 and I expect they will continue downhill." She said it was still important to maintain "conscious optimism about young people's vote." "They feel the need to make a difference and be-

cause of that, Saturday's march becomes an opportunity for their activism to impact their parents and relatives, whether they themselves turn out to the polls or not." Democrats said they intend to follow up with newly registered young voters mainly by text messages. — Reuters

Texas serial bomber made video confession before blowing himself up - police

PFLUGERVILLE: The serial bomber whose deadly attacks terrorized Austin, Texas, for weeks left a 25-minute video "confession" on a cell phone found after he blew himself up on Wednesday as officers closed in to make an arrest, police said. Mark Conditt, 23, an unemployed man from the suburb of Pflugerville, detailed how he made all seven bombs that have been accounted for - five that exploded, one that was recovered before it went off and a seventh that he detonated as officers rushed his vehicle early on Wednesday.

But the video failed to reveal a coherent motive for the attacks spread over the past three weeks, police said.

"He does not at all mention anything about terrorism, nor does he mention anything about hate, but instead it is the outcry of a very challenged young man, talking about challenges in his personal life," Austin Police Chief Brian Manley told reporters.

"I would classify this as a confession," Manley said. Conditt, who had never before been in trouble with the law, killed two people and wounded five with a campaign of violence that began on March 2, authorities said. Based on their search of the suspect's home and his video statement, authorities said they felt confident

that there were no other bombs and that the public was safe from further harm.

FBI special agent Christopher Combs said investigators believe the suspect would have continued his attacks had he not been apprehended. Police recovered a "target list" of addresses for future bombings, the Los Angeles Times reported, citing US Representative Michael McCaul of Texas, the Republican chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee.

Even so, the video gave no explanation for the individuals and addresses singled out as recipients of the bombs that were planted or shipped, Manley said.

Police previously said they had considered the possibility that the attacks were racially motivated, noting that the first several victims, including the two who died, were either African-American or Hispanic. Conditt likely recorded the video between 9 p.m. and 11 p.m. on Tuesday. According to Manley, Conditt said he believed police "were getting very close to him," and he was right. Authorities filed a criminal complaint and issued an arrest warrant around that time.

By Wednesday morning, police had tracked Conditt to a hotel and were waiting for the arrival of tactical units and equipment before they planned to make an arrest, Manley said. But then Conditt drove away.

Police followed and decided to stop him before he got on the highway. Just as officers approached the vehicle, the explosion went off, Manley said. There was also some police shooting.

"This can never be called a happy ending, but it's a damn good one for the people of this community, the people of the state of Texas," Travis County District Attorney Margaret Moore told reporters.

Residents in Austin, a city of 1 million people and a liberal enclave of university students and tech companies, voiced relief that the hunt for the serial bomber was over. —Reuters

Dashcam video shows final seconds before fatal Uber crash

WASHINGTON: Dashcam footage of the first fatal self-driving car crash involving a pedestrian shows the Uber vehicle operator appearing to be distracted, then gasping in horror seconds before the impact. The driver can be seen looking down at something for nearly five seconds before finally gazing up the instant before the car hit a woman in Tempe, in the US state of Arizona on Sunday.

Police there released the footage on Wednesday, along with dashcam video of the road in the final seconds before the pedestrian, who was walking with a bicycle, is struck on a poorly lit highway.

At first, from the driver's seat, only the pedestrian's feet are visible in the car's headlights.

About 1.5 seconds elapse from that point until the final frame of the video. The car was in autonomous mode. The woman was identified as 49-year-old Elaine Herzberg.

Uber said Monday it had temporarily halted its use of self-driving cars for testing or customer rides in Tempe, Pittsburgh, Toronto, and San Francisco. —AFP