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Colorado Senate president ousted from office over gun law

By KEITH COFFMAN

DENVER, Sept 10 (Reuters) — Colorado Senate President John Morse, one of two state lawmakers fighting historic recall elections because of his support of tougher gun control laws, conceded defeat on Tuesday as preliminary results showed him trailing, the Colorado Springs Gazette reported.

The recall races, the first in Colorado history, are at the epicenter of the national fight over gun control and were seen as a test of the sway of lobbyists on both sides of the debate.

Morse, who helped lead efforts to ban ammunition magazines with more than 15 rounds, was trailing 48.67 percent to 51.33 percent with 86 percent of the vote counted, according to the El Paso County Clerk's office.

Morse, a Democrat from Colorado Springs, was not immediately available for comment.

Also targeted was state Senator Angela Giron, of Pueblo. Giron, a Democrat, also appeared to be substantially behind in the early vote count, with 59.89 percent of voters backing her ouster compared with 40.11 percent who wanted her to stay in office, according to the Colorado Secretary of State's office. The data did not say what percentage of votes had been tallied.

The issue came to a head in Colorado after gun-rights activists accused Democrats of ramming through the gun control legislation in the aftermath of a series of U.S. mass shootings including the suburban Denver theater rampage in which 12 people were killed last year.

Angered by the gun control push, gun rights advocates sought the recall to send a message to current and future legislators that the bills had gone too far with efforts to curb firearm access. Opponents viewed the recall effort as a bullying tactic and not the proper way to handle a policy dispute.

Morse's Republican opponent, former Colorado Springs Councilman Bernie Herpin, said it was Morse's own unresponsiveness to constituents that prompted the recall effort, a process in which voters petition to remove an elected official before his or her term has ended.

"When you (have) 10,000 valid signatures on a recall petition, that's a powerful message," Herpin said before the voting ended.

Joshua Spivak, editor of the Recall Elections Blog, said the Colorado lawmakers were not the first in the nation to face recalls over gun control, and that a California lawmaker survived a recall over the same issue in 1994.

"The argument that the recall was supposed to be used only to oust corrupt officials is a long-running canard, one disproved by both history and the fact that there are actually seven states that limit the recall to corruption issues," Spivak said.