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## Battle ahead as Colorado Democrat John Morse fights gun-based recall

By KEITH COFFMAN

DENVER, Colo. — Gun-rights activists submitted a petition on Monday to initiate the first recall election of a state lawmaker in Colorado's history for his support of laws restricting firearms.

If the Colorado secretary of state validates at least 7,200 of the more than 16,000 signatures submitted, state Senate President John Morse, a Democrat, would face a recall. The move is being watched nationally by both sides of the gun-control debate.

Governor John Hickenlooper, also a Democrat, signed the bills into law.

The laws were passed in response to the mass shooting at an Aurora, Colorado, movie theater last July that killed 12 moviegoers and a shooting at a Connecticut elementary school in December that killed 26, including 20 children.

The group behind the recall, the Basic Freedom Defense Fund, said on its website that Morse, a former police officer, "has shown contempt for the constitutional liberties of the people he represents" and needs to be removed from office.

"I believe very strongly in freedom and liberty and all of that was trampled on by the legislature," said Anthony Garcia, the fund's spokesman.

Morse, who represents a swing district in Colorado Springs, told Reuters last month that the laws were common sense measures that voters in his district supported.

### 'CHILLING EFFECT'

"If they (gun-rights activists) are successful in removing the Senate president in Colorado, it will have a chilling effect on anyone who takes them on, but if they fail they will be exposed for the paper tiger they should be," Morse said.

If enough signatures are validated, a special election could be held in the fall, or Morse could resign his seat and allow his party to appoint a successor.

A spokesman for the secretary of state's office said the agency has 15 business days to verify the signatures.

Joshua Spivak, who operates the Recall Elections Blog, which tracks recall efforts across the country, said that since organizers turned more than twice the number of signatures required, a recall election is likely.

"I can think of only one instance where a recall was rejected when anything close to double the needed signatures were handed in," he said.

Spivak said lawmakers facing recall usually prevail in elections and with the gun-control issue at the center, lots of out-of-state money will be poured into the campaign.

Already the Washington D.C.-based Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee has weighed in, issuing a statement blasting the recall effort.

“Extremists in Colorado want to waste hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars to recall Senator Morse for the supposed ‘malfeasance’ of working to make his community safer,” the statement said.

The recall petition was submitted on the same day that a committee of the Nevada state Assembly approved a measure requiring background checks for most gun sales, sending it to Governor Brian Sandoval.

Sandoval, however has previously said that he would veto the bill.