

HOUSE

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mony the morning of the shooting, where Lexi was honored for making straight As.

"To celebrate, we promised to get her ice cream that evening, told her we loved her and we would pick her up after school," Kimberly Rubio said. "I can still see her walking with us toward the exit. In the reel that keeps scrolling across my memories, she turns her head and smiles back at us to acknowledge my promise.

"And then we left," she said. "I left my daughter at that school, and that decision will haunt me for the rest of my life."

The Democratic legislation, billed as the Protect Our Kids Act, would go further than any gun control measure that has passed the House since the assault weapons ban of the 1990s.

It would raise the age to buy semi-automatic rifles from 18 to 21, ban high-capacity magazines, create requirements for safe gun storage in homes, and crack down on so-called ghost guns that are built from kits and exempt from weapon sales regulation.

Lawmakers debate

The House passed the reforms on a mostly party-line vote of 223-204 over objections from Republicans. GOP members have panned the proposals as "radical attempts to legislate away Second Amendment rights." Others have called instead for a focus on boosting security at schools and increasing funding for mental health.

U.S. Rep. Tony Gonzales, a San Antonio Republican whose district includes Uvalde, spoke on the House floor, calling for funding mental health infrastructure, including a hospital in Uvalde. He did not mention the proposed gun laws.

"This is something that the community asked for," he said. "There's so much division here in Congress. There's so much hate



Miah Cerrillo, a fourth-grade student at Uvalde's Robb Elementary and survivor of the mass shooting, gave a prerecorded testimony to the House Committee on Oversight and Reform.

and rhetoric that gets spewed. I think mental health is an area that can bring us together, that can unite us as we go forward."

In the Senate, a bipartisan group of senators, including U.S. Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, is negotiating what is expected to be a much more limited set of proposals that can garner enough GOP support to pass the chamber.

Cornyn, who said Wednesday that he was "optimistic" as the group is "making steady progress," has said he won't support any proposal that affects the rights of law-abiding gun owners.

The United States has more mass shootings than any country in the world, but Congress has not passed any wide-ranging rewrite of gun laws or universal background checks in recent years.

Though public polling shows a vast majority of Americans back universal background checks for gun purchases, the polling is much less conclusive when Americans are asked whether the background checks would



Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Houston, speaks with pediatrician Roy Guerrero, who graphically described the hospital scene.

decrease the number of mass shootings or when they answer questions about specific legislation.

Victims unidentifiable

Those impacted by the May 14 mass shooting in Buffalo also called for action at Wednesday's committee meeting. Zeneta Everhart, whose son

Zaire Goodman was injured by a gunman who shot and killed 10 Black people in a Buffalo supermarket, described cleaning her son's wounds.

"Lawmakers who feel that we do not need stricter gun laws, let me paint a picture for you: My son Zaire has a hole in the right side of his neck, two on his back and another on his left leg.

FUNERAL

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had blocked the perimeter of services last week were not present.

The plan was for Annabell to be buried next to another victim — 10-year-old Xavier James Lopez, who was laid to rest Tuesday.

"I'm not ready," Annabell's grieving mother, Monica Gallegos, told ABC News over the weekend.

Xavier loved playing baseball, his obituary says. His grandmother, Amelia Sandoval, said her grandson was an energetic prankster who loved to dance cumbia.

Uvalde families have been laying loved ones to rest for more than a week now, many of them at Hillcrest Cemetery like

Annabell and Xavier.

Nine-year-old Elisha Anyah Garcia's funeral Mass at Sacred Heart Catholic Church was Monday morning. She was buried at Hillcrest Cemetery.

Annabell's family and friends weren't alone in their mourning Wednesday.

In the town square, a handful of mourners circled the massive memorial of flowers, candles, stuffed animals and crosses.

Tanya Villarreal, 45, and friend Christina Ochoa, 40, came with their teenage daughters. The group of four from Harlingen had been on a vacation in Concan and decided to pay their respects in Uvalde.

Before going to the town square, the group visited Robb Elementary. It brought Ochoa to tears.



The casket of 10-year-old Annabell Guadalupe Rodriguez is taken by a hearse to Hillcrest Cemetery on Wednesday.

"It's one thing when you see it in the news, and it's another thing when you're actually there and you see it," Villarreal said. "It becomes more real and you can feel the pain and hurt that parents must have felt

standing out there waiting."

At another memorial — at Robb Elementary — dozen of visitors left flowers and took photos and videos of the piles of offerings that have been growing since the tragedy.

MAPS

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the central business district."

Perez said he's heard from downtown businesses that just became aware they would be affected. The public maps have been difficult to interpret, with labeled streets not always readily viewable. Perez said he only learned of the proposed changes himself last week.

Politics could also be at play. District 5 Councilwoman Teri Castillo has situated herself as a progressive who staunchly supports labor and workers' rights — issues often at odds with the business community.

One City Hall insider also said District 5 may want something such as an H-E-B headquarters and other major business operations inside its boundaries.

"If they have to come to you to ask for something like an incentive," the insider said, "you then leverage to ask for something." That could be a higher pay scale for workers or consideration of future projects in the council member's district.

Tension brewed and residents and committee members grew visibly distressed Tuesday as they discussed the request. Previously contentious votes came back up for discussion. The prospect of Los Jardines regaining a portion of its neighborhood in District 6, which residents have long asked for, was again placed on the bargaining table. The



Attorney Tony Resendez addresses the city's Redistricting Advisory Committee during a meeting earlier this year.

committee also voted to send half of Brackenridge Park back to East Side District 2 instead of placing it entirely in District 1.

District 5 representatives said they had no idea District 1 was going to ask to maintain downtown. Amy Kastely, one of the District 5 appointees, accused Jordan Ghawi, a District 1 appointee, of retaliating against her for her vote on Brackenridge Park, though Ghawi disputed that characterization.

"I think it's a real perversion of our fair process," said Kastely, a law professor at the St Mary's University School of Law.

She said the move wasn't transparent for residents who thought it was settled. In the end, the committee added a meeting tentatively scheduled for 2 p.m. Saturday pending a location. They plan to only discuss the areas of the map that came un-

screwed Tuesday — downtown and Los Jardines.

The eleventh-hour proposals suggested a rift in the committee's ability to work together and agree on a final map with just more than a week left to make adjustments.

City Council is slated to vote on new map at its June 16 meeting next week. Mayor Ron Nirenberg has asked for a straight yes or no vote, without making changes, to build trust in what he created to be an independent committee free from the politics of elected officials.

In arguing District 1 should recapture downtown, Ghawi made a case for the numbers. The prior final proposed map left District 1 with the least population and gave the overall map a deviation of just under the legally permissible 10 percent.

But returning portions of downtown from District 5 to Dis-

trict 1 brings the entire map's deviation closer to 8 percent. Legally, it won't make a difference, but residents have called for the smallest deviation possible to ensure equity among city voters.

"It will bring back much-needed population that's already sparsely populated in our district, District 1," said Theresa Vargas Wyatt, another District 1 appointee. "These also have significant assets."

But the western edge of downtown also holds historical value for the West Side, Kastely said. Residents from the area will want to come out and talk about the change if confronted with it.

"I'm struggling," said Shelley Potter, one of Nirenberg's appointees to the committee. "This feels like all the sudden here, and I'm a little uncomfortable with that."

The marathon push on Tuesday to find compromises again opened up the possibility of returning parts of Los Jardines to District 6. A prior compromise split the neighborhood and parts of the Old Highway 90 business community between districts 5 and 6, moving Cuellar Park and the Edgewood Fine Arts Academy into District 5.

Residents have repeatedly spoken out against that change, saying they built a strong relationship with District 6 Councilwoman Melissa Cabello Havrda and her office. After the question of downtown's placement opened up, Kastely offered to return a portion of Los Jardines to

District 6 if District 5 could keep its hold on downtown.

The debate over downtown overshadowed another expected vote Tuesday on Brackenridge Park. The plan placed all of the 349-acre park into District 1, instead of keeping it split between districts 1 and 2.

Residents of River Road, who see themselves as closely entwined with ongoing issues at Brackenridge Park, wanted the entire park in their District 1. They said it would make it easier to work with the city on concerns there.

But over the last two weeks, District 2 residents showed up in droves to speak passionately about the park and ask to keep their half. Many said it held cultural significance for the Black community on the East Side. Other residents, who have been involved in ongoing protests against cutting down trees in Brackenridge Park, said they needed more than one person controlling the fate of the historic park.

District 1 appointees ultimately voted in favor of returning the split to the park.

The vote to reverse the initial plan on Brackenridge Park handed a win to District 2 Councilman Jalen McKee-Rodriguez, who had publicly asked for his portion of the park to be returned so nearby East Side neighborhoods like Mahancke Park could have a seat at the table.

Kimberly Rubio pushed for a ban on assault rifles and high-capacity magazines, but said she and her husband would at least accept raising the age to purchase AR-15s and getting rid of laws protecting gun manufacturers from lawsuits after shootings.

"We understand that for some reason, to some people — to people with money, to people who fund political campaigns — that guns are more important to children. So at this moment, we ask for progress," she said.

"Somewhere out there, there's a mom listening to our testimony, thinking, 'I can't even imagine their pain.' Not knowing that our reality one day will be hers. Unless we act now."

Janie Villarreal, 67, made the trip to Uvalde from San Antonio on Wednesday with her friend, Armando Rocha, 70. Villarreal cried as she made her way through the Robb Elementary memorial.

She has two grandchildren and one great-grandchild about the same age as the victims.

"They're little angels, going to heaven too soon," she said through tears.

Candles for each of the victims with their photos burned at the elementary school shrine. Annabell is pictured proudly displaying awards she had earned.

While some of the candles had blown out in the wind, Annabell's continued to burn after her funeral.

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