

EXTRA COPS AT POLL SITES

Suffolk looking at request to boost election security

BY CARL MACGOWAN
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Suffolk police are assessing a request to beef up patrols at polling places in schools during a special state Assembly election next month in the wake of the school shooting in Parkland, Florida.

Acting Commissioner Stuart Cameron said Tuesday that police are considering plans for an “enhanced police presence” at about 21 schools hosting polling places during the April 24 vote in the 5th Assembly District.

Democrat Deborah Slinchosky is facing Republican Douglas Smith to succeed Republican Al Graf, who vacated the seat to become a District Court judge.

The Feb. 14 shooting that killed 17 people at Marjory

Stoneman Douglas High School highlighted the potential vulnerability of schools, especially when hundreds of visitors are on campus, Cameron said in an interview.

“I’m pretty confident that when people go to vote . . . they’ll see an enhanced police presence,” Cameron said. “It will look somewhat different than it has in the past.”

He declined to discuss specific plans under review. Schools hosting polling places next month will be contacted as “part of the assessment,” he said.

Cameron said the police department typically assigns officers to assist the board of elections when elections are being held.

Cameron’s comments came after Brookhaven Town Supervisor Edward P. Romaine asked Suffolk County officials to consider assigning police to each of the schools where voting will take place next month.

“My request comes out of an abundance of caution in light of recent school shootings,” Ro-

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— Suffolk Democratic chairman Richard Schaffer

maine, a Republican, wrote in a Feb. 28 letter to County Executive Steve Bellone and Acting Police Commissioner John Barry. “A police presence would likely discourage tendencies toward violent action at any and all of our polling places.”

A Bellone spokesman referred questions to Cameron.

Suffolk Democratic chairman Richard Schaffer supported Romaine’s request.

“I think anytime we can make sure our children are protected is a good thing,” Schaffer said. “It probably would be

better to err on the side of caution.”

Lars Clemensen, president of the Suffolk County School Superintendents Association, said adding police would be an “appropriate measure” to protect students.

“On polling days, you have hundreds or potentially thousands of people who are not necessarily known face-to-face in a school building,” said Clemensen, superintendent of the Hampton Bays school system. “I don’t see how this can hurt.”

He said many school officials have been concerned for years that placing election polls at schools may jeopardize students and staff.

“We’re very protective of our campuses, in terms of who has access and who’s there,” Clemensen said. “This has been something that has been on our minds for a long time.”

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Stalemate in Albany on bump stock ban

BY YANCEY ROY
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ALBANY — The Democrat-led state Assembly approved a series of gun control bills Tuesday, including banning so-called bump stocks and requiring a longer waiting period for purchases. But there’s no indication the measures will gain passage in the Republican-led Senate, which, a day earlier, passed a series of school security measures that excluded gun controls.

The result is the two houses appear, for now, at a stalemate on legislation proposed in the wake of the latest school shooting mas-

sacre, in Parkland, Florida.

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie (D-Bronx), at a news conference, said “thoughts and prayers are not enough” to halt the steady stream of mass shootings in the United States. While he acknowledged state laws can only do so much, he said state lawmakers cannot sit by and wait for federal action.

“We won’t wait for another mass shooting,” Heastie said.

The Assembly leader said the Senate Republican legislative package, which included a bill to place an armed guard in every New York City school, was a move in the “wrong direction.”

“The point we’re trying to make is that more guns on top of students is not the answer,” Heastie said.

Bump stocks are illegal to use in New York, but legal to possess, sell and transport, legislators said. It’s the device Stephen Paddock, the shooter in the Las Vegas massacre, used to kill 58 and wound 800 in a matter of minutes. The sponsor of the ban bill, Assemb. Patricia Fahy (D-Albany), noted machine guns were outlawed decades ago and said lawmakers should do the same with bump stocks.

The Assembly approved the ban, 112-0.

The other Democratic bills would ban a person who has been deemed an “extreme risk protection order” by a court or a person who has been convicted of domestic violence from purchasing a firearm. All were approved overwhelmingly, with most Republicans in support.

“These were common-sense bills,” said Assemb. Dean Murray (R-East Patchogue).

Meanwhile, breaking with some Republican colleagues, a Long Island senator called for a ban on the sale and possession of bump stocks. State Sen. Elaine Phillips (R-Flower Hill) also called for tougher background

checks on would-be firearm purchasers and a ban on gun ownership by “people who present an imminent threat to themselves and others.”

Phillips, a first-term senator in a politically split district, said state lawmakers must act in the wake of the Parkland school massacre. “This is a seminal moment in our nation’s history and we must come together to act,” she said in a statement, noting she is a mother of three daughters.

Democrats on Tuesday said Phillips should have joined them a day earlier or the week prior when they tried to force a vote on bump stocks.