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## Official Quits in Backlash Over Colorado Gun Vote

by JACK HEALY

DENVER — A populist backlash against Colorado’s new gun-control laws claimed its third political casualty on Wednesday as a Democratic state senator resigned her seat rather than face a recall vote that could have cost her party control of the chamber.

For Democrats in this swing state, the resignation of the senator, Evie Hudak, was a sign of the growing political cost of their votes last winter to expand background checks and limit the size of ammunition magazines — measures once hailed as breakthrough victories in the effort to respond to mass shootings.

Polls show that voters embrace aspects of the new laws. But the measures have infuriated gun advocates and Republicans, and have become political liabilities in a state where the gun debate is shaped by traditions of hunting and sport-shooting, as well as by the shadows of mass shootings at Columbine High School and the Century 16 movie theater in Aurora.

In September, two prominent gun-control supporters were ousted in recall elections, reducing the Democrats’ edge in the State Senate to one seat. Ms. Hudak, who represents the suburbs northwest of Denver, would have been the third to face a recall vote, and she and state Democrats acknowledged that neither she nor the party’s 18-17 majority was likely to survive it.

“By resigning, I am protecting these important new laws for the good of Colorado,” she wrote in her resignation letter, referring to the slate of gun restrictions, including one she sponsored that seeks to keep guns away from domestic-violence offenders.

Ms. Hudak’s decision averts another potentially humiliating recall vote and allows a panel of county Democrats to choose her temporary successor, ensuring that Republicans cannot immediately take control of the Senate and force vulnerable Democrats into uncomfortable votes to repeal the gun laws or new regulations on rural electricity providers.

But Floyd Ciruli, a political analyst in Denver, said Ms. Hudak’s resignation amounted to a surrender before the fight began and was another sign of trouble for state Democrats. It comes weeks after voters overwhelmingly rejected a \$1 billion tax increase to reform Colorado’s schools, a measure championed by Gov. John W. Hickenlooper and other prominent Democrats.

“When you add all that in together and stir in the collapse of the national brand, the congressional Democrats, the president and the Affordable Care Act, it’s close to panic,” Mr. Ciruli said.

In recent weeks, as the recall efforts against Ms. Hudak gained momentum, she discussed her options with supporters and Democratic leaders, according to Morgan Carroll, the incoming Senate president. It quickly became clear that resignation was the least bad choice.

“She really, really struggled with it,” Ms. Carroll said. “She felt this was a necessary sacrifice to protect these things that were so important to her.”

Such tactical surrenders are not uncommon, said Joshua Spivak, a senior fellow at the Hugh L. Carey Institute for Government Reform at Wagner College in New York who tracks recall elections. There were at least 168 recall elections nationwide last year, he said, and in 26 cases, officials resigned before the vote.

Democrats, gun-control supporters and gay-advocacy groups offered thanks to Ms. Hudak on Wednesday, while her opponents expressed a mix of elation and outrage that she had

left office before a vote could take place. A pro-recall Facebook page stamped the word “Coward” on her photograph.

“We all know that this is about control and power and the gun-grabbing, citizen-ignoring Democrats elected to the Colorado State Legislature,” some opponents wrote on the “Recall Hudak Too” website.

In Ms. Hudak’s district, her critics said they were thrilled. For weeks, they have been gathering signatures to force a recall vote, putting up “Recall Hudak” lawn signs and writing blog posts outlining the case against her. Gordon Allison, who helped gather signatures, said that weeks of knocking on doors and chatting with neighbors had paid off.

“This is just a politician who needs to be gone,” he said.

But others felt shortchanged and said they were angry that Ms. Hudak’s successor was likely to share many of her views.

“She walks away, the Democrats get to appoint another Democrat,” said Dave Palm, who has helped circulate petitions and run the pro-recall website. “They saw the writing on the wall.”

Ms. Hudak, 62, a former teacher and member of Colorado’s Board of Education, faced an uphill fight against a passionate opposition in a low-turnout election. She was re-elected in 2012 by 584 votes. Her opponents failed to gather enough valid signatures to force a recall vote in their first effort this spring, but they believed they were within reach this time.

Colorado is one of 19 states that allow recalls of state officials, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Voters can oust officials for any reason if they collect enough signatures and win a special election.

Until this year, no state lawmaker here had been removed in a recall vote. That changed in September, when John Morse, the State Senate president, and Senator Angela Giron lost their seats in an election that was funded heavily by the National Rifle Association and by gun-control advocates like New York’s mayor, Michael R. Bloomberg.

On Wednesday, Ms. Hudak’s supporters gathered at a library to offer words of support and thanks. Her opponents attended, too, offering more criticism. Ms. Hudak did not attend.