

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH PAUL HELMKE, PRESIDENT OF THE BRADY  
CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

SUBJECT: GUN VIOLENCE IN AMERICA

MODERATOR: JERRY ZREMSKI, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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MR. ZREMSKI: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon and welcome to the  
National Press Club. My name is Jerry Zremski, and I'm the Washington  
bureau chief for the Buffalo News and president of the National Press  
Club. I'd like to welcome club members and their guests who are here  
today, as well as those of you who are watching on C-SPAN.

We're looking forward to today's speech, and afterwards I will  
ask as many questions as time permits. Please hold your applause  
during the speech so that we have as much time for questions as  
possible. For our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you  
hear applause, it may be from the guests and members of the general  
public who attend our luncheons and not necessarily from the working  
press. (Laughter.)

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to  
stand briefly when their names are called. From your right: Nicholas  
Benson, the owner and editor of the Falls Church News-Press; Maurine  
Groppe, chairwoman of the Board of Governors of the National Press  
Club and the Indiana reporter for Gannett News Service; Ken Carube  
(sp), bureau chief of Gizi (ph) Press; Joe Enoch, congressional  
correspondent for consumeraffairs.com and a native of Fort Wayne,  
Indiana; Laura Helmke-Long, daughter of the speaker and also native of

Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Skipping over our podium, Melissa Charbonneau of CBN News and vice chair of the NPC Speakers Committee; skipping over our speaker for just a second, Sylvia Smith, secretary of the National Press Club, Washington editor of The Fort Wayne Journal Gazette and the Speakers Committee member who organized today's lunch; Kenneth Barnes Sr., CEO of ROOT Incorporated and a guest of the speaker; Fiola Ginger (sp), education editor for Bloomberg News; Donna Leinwand, treasurer of the NPC and crime reporter for USA Today; Mark Schoeff, reporter for Crane's (sp) Workforce Management and a regular contributor to the Howey Political Report of Indiana; and the Reverend Jim Atwood of Springfield, Virginia, a guest of the speaker. (Applause.)

You might not expect to see a lifelong Republican at the helm of the nation's biggest gun control organization, but when the Brady campaign to prevent gun violence was looking for a new president last year, the group chose Paul Helmke, who is with us today, to be its lead spokesman on an issue often associated with Democrats. "We wanted, as a leader, somebody who could help bring a consensus," the group's honorary chairwoman, Sara Brady, said at the time.

The Brady Campaign is named for former White House Press Secretary James Brady, who was shot in 1981 during an assassination attempt against then-President Ronald Reagan. Over the years, the group has advocated legislation to require a waiting period for gun purchases and a ban on the sale of assault weapons, which has since expired. Before taking the helm at the Brady Campaign, Helmke was a three-term mayor of Fort Wayne, Indiana and president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

Helmke's interest in so-called "common-sense" gun laws is rooted in two episodes early in his life. In the mid-1960s, one of his best friends accidentally shot another good friend with a gun he didn't know was loaded. Then, three decades later, as mayor of Fort Wayne, Helmke confronted the effects of crime and violence in his city. He said, "I saw what the illegal guns and misused guns were doing and saw the bad guys with better firearms than some of our police departments."

Both Helmke and Sara Brady stress the bipartisan nature of the early work on gun control legislation, but the issue has unquestionably become a largely partisan one in the last two decades. The Brady group's political arm has made \$1.8 million in contributions to candidates, most of them Democrats. The National Rifle

Association, by contrast, has given 15.3 million (dollars) to candidates since 1980, with 77 percent sent to Republicans.

Of course, one logical question for today's speaker would be, will the politics of gun control change in wake of the shootings two weeks ago at Virginia Tech, which claimed 33 lives?

The National Press Club decided to invite Helmke immediately after the shootings. A similar invitation has also been made to Wayne LaPierre of the National Rifle Association, and we hope to have him or another spokesman for the organization at our podium sometime this

month.

But today the podium belongs to Paul Helmke. Let me -- please join me in helping him -- helping welcome him to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

MR. HELMKE: Thank you for having me here today, and I thank all of you for being here to listen. It's an issue that is very important to me and to a lot of people in this country.

Thirty-two people were murdered at Virginia Tech. Now, that number in and of itself was not extraordinary. Every day in our country, on average, about 32 people are murdered with guns -- every day. When you add suicides and unintentional shootings, the death toll from guns in America each day is about 80 people. And for every death, there are another two or three that are seriously injured. Since the start of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, while about 3,700 of our soldiers have died overseas, over 162,000 of our citizens have died from gunfire here at home.

The stories of these daily deaths are generally relegated to the insides of the local newspaper, if they're covered at all, and almost no one takes the time to stop and focus about how those lives could have been saved. The stories come too frequently, and their volume brings a sense of inevitability and hopelessness about the toll of guns in America.

The gun epidemic is our monthly 9/11, our weekly Katrina, a continuing Iraq war on our street and in our schools; it's our daily Virginia Tech. Yet, we don't focus on this threat until we get a Virginia Tech, and then we allow our political leaders to slowly and deliberately delay until we are all busy with other challenges, and then our leaders let us down, content that we're no longer paying attention.

To say that we're sorry about these -- that these shootings happened is not enough. We should be ashamed. All of us should be ashamed that we have allowed this to happen. We much all say to the victims at Virginia Tech and their families, and to the families of gun violence victims every day, we have failed you, all of us, and we can do better.

To a world community in which citizens generally accept reasonable restrictions on gun ownership, the massacres seem both horrific and unsurprising. The rest of the industrialized world, after all, has figured out how to respond. After dangerous people used guns to kill people, these countries decided that they should keep dangerous people from getting guns. And guess what? Those gun restrictions worked.

More people were murdered with guns -- more people are murdered with guns every day in America than in a year in England.

We suffer as many gun deaths every 16 hours as the Virginia Tech killer's native country, South Korea, suffers in a year.

I don't believe that America -- Americans are not more violent

than everyone else. We are not more criminal. We are not more mentally disturbed or dangerous. Our movies and video games and music may be too violent, but they aren't that much different than those in other countries. Every industrialized country has people who are dangerous, disturbed, distraught and depressed, but only in America do they have such easy access to guns -- and extraordinary firepower at that.

After the Virginia Tech shootings, opinion leaders and politicians around the world, our friends and our allies, begged us to take notice and change our ways. The Times of London editorialized, quote, "It's so familiar you could write the script yourself. Only the names change: Jonesboro, Columbine, Lancaster County, and now Virginia Tech. The simple truth is that Americans themselves remain unwilling to take drastic measures to restrict gun availability." Close quote.

The response was the same in Russia, India, Spain and elsewhere. Australia's conservative Prime Minister, John Howard, talking about an incident that happened there 12 years ago, was most pointed. Quote, "We took action to limit the availability of guns, and we showed a national resolve that the gun culture that is such a negative in United States would never become a negative in our country."

Hearing that legitimate, searing criticism of our country puts me at a loss for words. How do we defend our insane policy toward guns? Some have suggested that Virginia Tech is a wake-up call. But consider all of our previous wake-up calls: when a 16-year-old shot nine students, killing two at a Pearl, Mississippi school in October of '97, that was a wake-up call. When a 14-year-old shot eight students, killing three at a school in West Paducah, Kentucky in December of '97, that was a wake-up call. When an 11-year-old and a 13-year-old killed five at their Jonesboro, Arkansas school in March of '98, that was a wake-up call. The school shootings at Edinboro, Pennsylvania and Springfield, Oregon and Lake Worth, Florida and the six-year-old who killed his classmate at a Michigan elementary school, and the school shooting at Essex, Vermont -- they were all wake-up calls -- and Columbine, and Red Lake, and just six months ago the

Amish schoolhouse in Nickel Mines. Children throughout the country gunned down in their schools; these were all wake-up calls.

But how about the workplace shootings? Man with an AK-47 killing four in Orange County, California; fired worker shooting seven, killing four in Akins (ph) County, Georgia; an accountant killing four in Newington, Connecticut; a driver killing three in Palom (ph), Alabama; day trader in Atlanta, Georgia killing 12 and then himself; the shooting at the Johnson Space Center just days after Virginia Tech -- working people gunned down in their jobs, all wake-up calls.

And then, of course, there was the Washington, D.C. sniper shootings that terrorized this area for weeks with the threat of gunfire. Many recall the ordinary moments that turned out to be the victims' last -- a trip to the Home Depot, mowing a lawn, preparing to drive a bus. Some of you remember living under the threat of the sniper's guns -- living as if in a war zone -- that was a wake-up call. And these lists aren't comprehensive. There isn't time to

mention them all -- the assassinations of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy, the attempts on Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin Roosevelt and Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan. Those are certainly wake-up calls, and some of those even lead to the short list of federal gun laws we have now.

So the alarms have been relentless, but our response again and again has been to hit the snooze button. There is no more need for a wake-up call. The need now is for action. I'm reminded of the bumper sticker, "If you aren't outraged, you aren't paying attention." After tragedies like Virginia Tech, we're all paying attention. We're wide awake; we're outraged. At moments like this change can happen, but how do we go about getting this change?

As in a 12-step program, the first step is to admit we have a problem. Our problem is the insane, weak gun policies we have in this country, policies that enable the Virginia Tech killer to obtain the means to kill and that enable so many other dangerous people each and every day.

Is insane to strong of a word to describe our current gun policies? Let's analyze what kind of laws we have on the books now. In almost every state, there is no limit on the number of guns you can buy in a single purchase. Purchases of multiple guns -- whether 100 or 1,000 or more -- do require another form notifying the ATF, but the guns are sold and no additional questions are asked about why someone wants their own private arsenal.

Where do you think these weapons end up? Isn't it obvious why it's so easy for gang members in our cities to get guns on their street? In most states, a felon or other person prohibited from buying guns can simply go to a gun show, to an unlicensed seller, and buy any and all the guns he wants with no identification, no background check, no questions asked.

Recall that the guns used by the killers at Columbine were bought from unlicensed sellers at gun shows. The teenage girl who bought three of the killers' guns said she wouldn't have bought them if she would have had to show an ID or to do the legal paperwork.

And here we are, eight years later and we've still done nothing to stop these unchecked, off the books gun sales by unlicensed dealers -- by unlicensed sellers. Uzis, AK-47s, 50-round magazines, and all manner of military hardware are wholly legal for civilians to purchase under our current federal law. Even 50-caliber sniper rifles that can shoot down airplanes and have a range of over a mile are available to anyone who can buy a rifle. No permits, no licenses, no wait.

Just two years ago, Congress and the president let a ban on high-capacity magazines and assault weapons lapse. Law enforcement around the country stood up for the ban. They knew firsthand that these were tools of war, useful to civilians primarily for large-scale offensive assaults. So what happens next? These high-capacity magazines are apparently used by the Virginia Tech killer in just that sort of a mass assault. And from those unlicensed sellers at gun shows and elsewhere, that military hardware is available to felons, the mentally ill, and dangerous individuals. Even suspected terrorists who are

deemed too dangerous to fly in our airplanes are allowed to buy all the guns they desire from any dealer, as long as they don't show up with a felony record.

After 9/11, the attorney general would not let the FBI see if the suspected terrorists had purchased guns. Law enforcement can no longer check approved gun sales records, as most are destroyed within 24 hours; but the government can still search libraries' book records to see what books the school kids borrow. We used to get data that showed what types of guns were used in crime and where they came from. We learned that about 1 percent of gun dealers were responsible for selling almost 60 percent -- 60 percent of all crime guns. But now Congress makes that data secret. The police are prevented from finding out about the corrupt gun dealers who flood their city streets with guns. A bartender can be liable for serving too much beer to a patron who drives, but gun dealers who sell hundreds of guns to traffickers or terrorists -- shielded from civil liability.

Is insane too strong a word to describe our weak gun laws? Even the few laws we have are not adequately administered and enforced. The Virginia Tech killer was barred by federal law from buying guns because he'd been adjudicated mentally ill and dangerous. But Virginia, like most states, didn't send the court orders about his mental health to the police, so he could simply lie and buy. As a result, even our schools, that should be sanctuaries for our children, have been invaded by gun violence. And we must make our classrooms safe and we should make our -- we must make our classrooms safe and we should make our communities as safe as we would like our classrooms to be.

So what are we going to do about this? Here are three things that we can do. Number one, comprehensively and effectively apply the Brady background check system so no one who we want to prohibit from buying guns can legally buy one. Effective background checks would have stopped the Virginia Tech killer from buying his guns.

Number two, reduce access to weaponry that is not for sport and not for self defense. Had Congress and the president not allowed the assault weapons ban to expire, the killer may not have been able to obtain the high-capacity magazines he used in his assault.

Number three, give our police and federal law enforcement the tools and resources they need to fight gun crimes, including illegal gun trafficking and corrupt gun dealers.

And this should include a focus on new technologies, such as microstamping and other ballistic identification systems which might have allowed authorities to identify the Virginia Tech shooter earlier, before his second, most deadly rampage.

Specific proposals to reduce gun violence that flow from these three general recommendations are available on our web site and we've got some more of the specifics on the table outside. There are other things that we at the Brady Campaign and the Brady Center, working with our Million Mom March chapters and state allies, are going to do. We intend to hold our political leaders accountable if they fail to take action, Democrat and Republicans alike. We offered fair and

principled criticism of the Republican-controlled Congress for weakening America's gun laws over the past six years; we intend to be equally critical of the new Democratic Congress, if they choose to ignore this crisis.

We will provide expert advice to state governments who want to strengthen their responses to gun violence. Virginia leaders are taking steps to prevent individuals who've been adjudicated as dangerous because of mental illness from being approved for a gun purchase, and we're helping them to determine how to do this. We're willing to give that same level of constructive assistance to every state in the union that requests it. We're also setting up a web site for Americans to answer what they are going to do to stop the gun violence, called VDVoice.com. And you can tape your video right outside as you leave the luncheon today, and we'll post it on line. Others can upload their personal videos to the site. Instructions for this -- and this is beyond my understanding -- instructions are available at our web site, which is [www.bradycampaign.org](http://www.bradycampaign.org).

Gun violence prevention should not be controversial. The overwhelming majority of Americans believe that gun violence is a huge problem. Most Americans believe that guns are too easily available to dangerous people. Most believe that we should have tougher gun laws. Most, including gun owners, support the types of policy proposals that I've suggested today.

There's always a -- there's a small, vocal minority that says more guns are the solution, not the problem. And to them I say, "We've tried that." We have tried a system where guns are easily available. We have tried a system where any felon or dangerous mental patient can buy the guns he wants from an unlicensed seller. We have tried a regime of easy access to assault weapons and limitless gun sales, and the result has been almost 30,000 dead each year. What we're doing now isn't working. We can do better.

What we need is outrage -- sustained outrage. Most Americans understand the problem. They understand the solutions that we need. Most people don't see why a felon or mentally ill person who is barred from buying guns can go to a gun show or respond to a classified ad and buy guns, no questions asked. Most people understand why a gun trafficker or a gang member might want to buy 10 or 20 guns at a time, but they don't see why a legitimate gun owner can't make do with some reasonable limits on the number of handguns he can purchase at one time.

What we need is vigilance -- an insistence that we keep fighting for the safety of our children and families here at home, even after the news cycle turns back to the war abroad, the presidential horse race, and the latest celebrity scandal. What we need is participation from all sectors of society. We've had great cooperation from mayors and city officials, from law enforcement. In recent years, the business community has risen to fight efforts to force guns into the workplace. The educational community has fought to keep guns out of schools. All these groups and others need to join in our national effort to bring common sense to the issue of guns.

What we need is hope -- a belief that the epidemic of American gun violence can be solved, and that America is not fated to lose 30,000 people to guns every year. We need a national conversation about our gun problem. We need to ask elected officials and each other, consistently and constantly, "What are you going to do about it?" I'd suggest that all of us have a responsibility to join the national conversation and become part of the solution to the gun violence problem. Gun owners need to join this conversation. Almost all the gun owners I know are reasonable, decent Americans. They believe -- and I believe they're willing to put up with minor inconveniences, like a background check, if this will stop guns from getting into the wrong hands. After all, we all endure security lines and metal detectors. We recognize that speed limits apply to the Jeff Gordons as well as the Paul Helmkes in our society, regardless of who can make that 90-mile-per-hour turn. We write -- we write laws for all of us, because they help make us safer. We should all be willing to endure a little red tape, if it helps reduce the amount of yellow tape at crime scenes in our country.

Doing something about gun violence will benefit every one of us. Last week the NRA's chief, Wayne LaPierre, was quoted as follows, quote, "We just don't think it's really gun control to try to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and the mentally defective," close quote. And I guess -- I guess it depends on what the definition of gun control is, but I'm encouraged to see that Mr. LaPierre agrees that we should do more -- more to prevent the wrong people from getting guns.

Today I'm publicly reaching out to Mr. LaPierre and the NRA. Let's set aside our past attacks and our past differences and sit down to see if we can find some common ground on some steps to make our communities safer. Since Virginia Tech, both the NRA and the Bush administration have signaled publicly their willingness to support some new common-sense measures to make guns less easily available to dangerous people. Let's sit down now and directly address these issues, and let's do it sooner than later.

Now, there'll be passionate voices opposing any step forward, any attempt at compromise. They'll change the subject, urge delay, impugn motives, call names and complicate attempts to reach agreement. But we must act. We can do something. We can do better. We can't be a shining city on a hill when we're an armed camp. I think we all want an America where children are free to go to school without fear of being shot, where parents are free to go to their jobs without fear of a shooting, and neighbors are free to stand on their sidewalk or sit on their porch and talk to their -- their friends without fear of a drive-by.

But too many of our neighbors are suffering that same pain experienced by the Virginia Tech victims and families every day, 32 times a day. What are we -- what are you -- going to do about it?

Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Thank you very much. We have an awful lot of questions, some about Virginia Tech, some about Congress. Let's start with Virginia Tech. Have you met with any of the Virginia Tech



shooting victims' families, and will you be able to count on their support?

MR. HELMKE: We haven't yet. Whenever there's a victim, whether it's Virginia Tech or elsewhere, we make ourselves available.

We've got resources that we have to help, and generally we don't want to push the victims. Some victims don't want to go public, some do want to channel their anger and their grief into a chance to make positive change. And we generally wait for the victims to speak up and then we'll work closely with them. But that's one of our prime focuses. Jim Brady, Sarah Brady were victims. We're here because of the victims. We're here to make sure there's less victims in the future.

Q Some opponents of gun control have asked the question, if the professors or students at Virginia Tech had had guns, they could have shot Cho earlier and stopped the killing. What would your response be to that?

MR. HELMKE: I was a mayor for 12 years, and before I hired police officers, they had to go through extensive psychological testing, background checks, training. And even after we hired them and they took those tests and had the background checks, they had to have constant and regular updates on weapons training. And the prime issue with weapons training is always: when do you pull the weapon and where do you shoot when you've got the weapon.

And the test -- and I learned, as mayor, that they make mistakes. I had a police training officer kill a recruit because he didn't realize there was a bullet in the chamber. I knew of other situations where mistakes were made. Guns are serious things to have. It's tough for a police officer to respond.

And what became clear to me after that experience is that while we would all wish and hope that John Wayne or James Bond were sitting in one of those classrooms and could have taken out the killer, that that's more something that happens in movies than in real life. That in real life, that's usually going to be the person -- if they've got their gun handy, is going to be the first one shot; that's going to be the one that is going to miss; that's going to be the one that the police aren't going to know if it's the good guy or bad guy when they rush in; and that's going to be the one that, on the days when these shootings aren't occurring, is going to lose the weapon, have the weapon stolen, have the weapon misused.

Homes with more guns have more violence. Communities with more guns have more violence. States and countries with more guns have more violence. More guns in the classroom isn't the answer, we need to keep those guns out of the classroom in the first place.

Q In your speech today, you really suggested a dialogue with the NRA -- really unlike what's happened before I believe. Why do you think it has been the case that we haven't had this sort of civil debate on gun violence so far?

MR. HELMKE: I've just been here 10 months, -- (laughter) -- so I'm not sure about why. And it's interesting, I think one of the reasons that mayors around the country, local officials around the country, have brought up this issue -- because they're used to, when they see a problem, to try to solve it. And when I took this job, I thought, here's a problem, let's try to solve it. And let's -- first step towards solving a problem is to admit you've got a problem and sit down with the others to get the ideas on the table.

I think that in the past groups on all sides of the issue have benefited by not having the dialogue. It allows them to continue to go to their members and raise false fears, and say that any attempt at compromise is the "camel's nose under the tent," "a slippery slope," and that therefore you can't do anything. I reject that. In everything else in American life, we've been able to take common-sense compromises to improve our lives. We can do that on gun violence.

One of the reasons I cited other countries here -- somebody said, you know, "What do we care what other countries think about us?" One of the reasons I cited them is because other countries have figured

out answers. And maybe we need different answers, but this isn't an incurable disease, this isn't an unsolvable problem. We can make a difference. And that's why, really, my challenge to Mr. LaPierre, my challenge to the Bush administration, my challenge to others who have supported the so-called Gun Rights Movement is, let's sit down and figure out where we can compromise, what we can do to bring us closer together. And I'm willing to consider any idea that's out there. Let's sit down and let's get something done because what we're doing now is clearly not working.

Q Why is the NRA so powerful?

MR. HELMKE: I think when you mentioned those dollars on contributions -- that says something. They're a very well organized group. They have been very successful in convincing their membership that any attempt to compromise is a threat to the rest of them. And one of the things I constantly tell my friends back in Indiana is, I'm not trying to take away the hunter's gun. I'm not trying to take away the collector's gun. If you think you need a gun for your self-protection and you know what you're doing and you realize the risks involved, I'm not trying to take that away either.

But I think the NRA has successfully scared a lot of their members into thinking that any attempt to talk, any attempt to compromise, is going to take their shotgun away and mess up deer season next year. And that's not the case. So you've got a membership that's been afraid; you've got a very successful political action group that gives a lot of money; you've got a group that's been excellent at getting their members excited about things. And, again, I've got no problems with the hunters.

But we need the membership of the NRA to say, "Let's use some common sense here," "Let's figure out where we can find common ground." And I think, for elected officials, they need to realize that most American people support these things, and that they don't need to be afraid of the next election cycle just because it might

upset some of the leadership at the NRA or other groups. Safety for our communities, freedom to be able to go to your school and work without fearing a shooting -- those are values that I think the voters are going to respond to. They've responded there in the past, and I think we just need elected officials to hear from the rest of us that that's what we want.

Q Does the NRA have any political vulnerabilities that you can exploit? (Laughter.)

MR. HELMKE: If I find them, yeah. I don't make that -- (laughter) -- my offer to meet is made in all sincerity, so I'm not looking for weak spots. I think when the American people saw the tragedy two weeks ago at Virginia Tech, it was a shock to them. It was a shock that so many could be killed so quickly; that so many could be killed in a place that had been perceived as a sanctuary; that somebody who -- if you'd asked his roommates or his professors

whether he should have gotten a gun, you wouldn't have had anybody that said, yes, this person should get a gun.

You know, we make it tougher to get a job at Target than we do to get a gun in this country. And I think when the American people saw that -- and then they realized that in the eight years since Columbine we hadn't done anything; in the six months since the Amish school shootings we'd done nothing -- I think most Americans thought something had been done, and so two weeks ago put the focus on it. And then when they realize that this happens every day in this country, I think they're going to speak up.

I think that's why this is an issue that I continue to hear back in Indiana -- about back in Indiana; that I'm continuing to see on the news shows; that I'm -- that even when the politicians and the pundits are saying, "This isn't going to be an issue," they're talking about the issue. And I think when the issue is focused on -- when the issue is talked about, and when the public says something needs to be done, then something is going to happen.

Q How do you explain the lack of political action in the wake of something like the Virginia Tech tragedy?

MR. HELMKE: It's only been two weeks -- and I know it's easy to get frustrated with politicians, I've been one most of my life. I think after past tragedies, elected officials realized that it wasn't just an easy, "Let's vote for this bill," or "Let's push this policy." I think, and I truly hope and believe, that politicians, elected officials, want to do the right thing, and I think they realize that it does take this dialogue first. That it's going to take a number of things -- expand those background checks to all sales -- who can disagree with that? And the LaPierre quote is basically saying, you know, "There are groups we don't want to have guns" -- we can define that. And you can argue about what the definition is, but once you've defined it, then you don't want them to get guns. And the only way to do that is -- not to ask them whether they're on the list, it's to check. And that means a background check and that might mean a waiting period and that might mean having better databases. And there are bills that deal with all those things.

So I think as our elected officials realize that there is grounds for some compromise, that the American people want something done, that we can learn from the other countries, then I think the politicians are going to be there. Politicians don't like to get too far out in front of the people, but when they know that the people want something, I think they're willing to lead. That's why America's mayors have stood up in the past and I think that's why we're going to be seeing people in Congress doing the same thing.

Q Do you think the congressional leadership of the Democrats took an oath of silence on the gun issue so as to put a higher premium on reelecting conservative Democratic freshmen?

MR. HELMKE: I don't know about an oath of silence. Last week's Democratic presidential debate -- this was one of the issues that was talked about. And it was talked about very supportingly by most of the candidates. I'm guessing that this will be an issue that comes up in the Republican presidential debate this week.

The people in Congress are nervous, leadership in Congress is nervous -- the majorities aren't large. People know how to do the numbers -- they don't want to risk seats. My job, our job as the public, is to convince the elected that they win votes by doing this, and I believe this firmly.

I think in Indiana, in Virginia, in California, in New York, the candidate that raises these issues about common sense approaches, about making our schools and workplaces safer, our neighborhoods safer -- I think that candidate's going to pick up votes.

As long as they make it clear they're not a threat to the shooter, they're not talking about confiscating anybody's weapons, and we're not -- we've got common sense measures that can make a difference, I think the politicians will come along. My job is to convince leadership that this is a good thing to have. We're honoring Rahm Emanuel in two weeks here at one of our events -- he's part of the leadership. I'm hoping that he can convince his members and others to come along.

Q What is the most realistic way to resolve the gun control problem in Congress?

MR. HELMKE: I think the proposals I talked about are the ones that make the most sense. First of all, Brady background checks are something that have already been accepted. So once you've got that, it's not a question, really, of something completely different, it's making the concept that we've already adapted work. And you do that by expanding it to all sales, you do that then by making sure the database has all the information, you do that by asking the question -- you know, "Is this somebody that's on the prohibited list?" and doing some checking to see if they got it. Again, we've figured out how to do this with other things. Other countries have figured out how to do it.

Another thing is to say that some of these weapons shouldn't really be out there. The high-capacity clips is the most the most

obvious one. Given this -- the shooting, it would have been banned under the old 1994 act. I think that's a common sense step that Congress can take quickly. So -- you know, strengthening the computer system that's got the data, looking at expanding the background checks, looking at the high-capacity clips -- those shouldn't take a whole lot of political courage. It just takes some political common sense.

MR. ZREMSKI: Have you talked to members of the Democratic leadership or people closely connected with them in the last two weeks, and what kind of sense have you gotten from them about how realistic it is to move gun control legislation this year?

MR. HELMKE: My sense from elected officials -- leadership elsewhere is they're not sure. They don't know whether this is going to be something that dies down immediately or not. And again, that's why we're reaching out to our membership, our activists and the general public to ask the public, "What are you going to do about it?" And we want the public to ask the elected officials, "What are they going to do about it?" And it gets into the other issue about what can be done.

I -- for 25 years, the Brady Center -- Brady Campaign have proposed policy ideas. And other than the Brady Bill, that -- and the assault weapons ban that's been allowed to expire, that's basically all we've got. I mean, there've been other minor things, but there aren't too many laws on the books. We've had tons of ideas, tons of proposals -- big picture, small picture -- and rarely have they been adopted. And so I'm trying to put the onus back on the elections to say, "We've thrown out" -- and the NRA -- "We've thrown out ideas. You've turned them down and what we're doing now isn't working. What are you going to do about it?" And I think when all of us talk to our elected officials, what we want from them is some leadership. And so whether it's Speaker Pelosi or Leader Reid or President Bush or the candidates -- you know, if I had -- when I get a chance to talk to them, it's "What are you going to do about it?" Because right now, it's not working.

MR. ZREMSKI: People who oppose additional gun legislation often say that existing laws should be enforced, not expanded. What existing laws are poorly enforced?

MR. HELMKE: Well, the most obvious one is the background checks with regard to information on those who've been adjudicated mentally ill, and it's -- again, the Virginia Tech situation shows that clearly. If Virginia had followed the law, and the 1968 Gun Control Act which was passed only after Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were killed -- but the '68 Gun Control Act defines the categories of who were prohibited purchasers. And one of the categories deals with what they refer to in that act is "adjudicated mentally defective." That's been defined by ATF as someone who a court or other court-like group -- basically a court or a magistrate -- is found to be a danger to themselves or others because of mental illness. The state of Virginia -- the courts in the state of Virginia found the shooter there to be a danger to himself or others because of mental illness. Pretty clear when you look at the '68 act or the ATF definitions and what the Virginia court did that he was a prohibited purchaser. They

didn't give that information to the Virginia state police. Because of that, when he went in to buy the gun, he doesn't show up on the list.

The tragedy here -- I mean, the sad part of this is that Virginia does a better job than most states. Virginia actually sends in more records than most states. And -- you know, so that shows how gaping the holes are. We're not following the 1968 act, we're not following the clear intent of the Brady Bill from 1993-1994, so let's strengthen

-- let's make sure we're doing that right. Congresswoman McCarthy's got a good bill to strengthen the data system -- the database system -- the (NIC ?) system here. That's a step that we can take right away to improve things and then let's build from there to make sure that we're getting all the information from all the states, that we're clearly doing those background checks and asking those questions of everyone who goes in to buy a gun.

MR. ZREMSKI: With civil rights and privacy concerns in cases involving mental patients, how can you ensure that records checks will work?

MR. HELMKE: Records checks have worked in the states that have supplied good records. And that -- there's, I think, a lot of misunderstanding in -- lately over what, actually, the federal act covers. It doesn't cover someone whose gone to their counselor, gone to their therapist, gone to their doctor and then asked to do counseling, asked to have to take some medications, asked to do some therapy. It only restricts people who have had a court finding saying that they're of a danger to themselves or others because of mental illness. So at this stage, you've got a court. And once you've got a court, you've got a record that is reportable and is kept and should be searchable. And we've even -- the system is even set up in such a way that if a state has restrictions on saying that someone's on that record -- on that database and a danger to themselves or others because of mental illness, the (NIC ?) system allows you -- allows the state to send that information and just say, "This is a denied purchaser." You don't have to give the reason.

So we've already written things in, and one of the things we're willing to do with our legal staff is to work with states and others to try to get this system to work more smoothly. State definitions have to fit the federal definition, and we just have to make sure we report it. And bottom line is any of the people that knew the shooter knew that he shouldn't have been the sort of person to get a gun. If we know that -- if the roommates knew that, if the professors knew that, then those of us that allowed these guns to be sold to that person should do something about it.

MR. ZREMSKI: Given what's happened in past elections, how big an issue do you think gun control will be in 2000 -- in the 2008 presidential election?

MR. HELMKE: I think once candidates for president and candidates for other offices realize that this is something the American people care about, I think they'll be addressing it and I think it'll be an issue. Again, the tragedy of Virginia Tech will be compounded if we don't do something as a result of that tragedy. We already have those

32 other murderers every day in this country. We're going to continue to see this. It's not a surprise that this happens when we have such weak gun laws in this country. And I think once the politicians do the political calculus, they'll realize that -- actually, it's interesting. In the 2006 election cycle in the races where we

endorsed and the NRA endorsed, we won 80 percent of those races. You know, and -- you know, they -- they're usually -- we're only -- both sides are usually endorsing if you think you've got a good chance to win, though we won 80 percent. I don't know of a single race for any office in the country in those six where somebody standing for common sense gun measures lost their race because of that stand.

Even if you look back to 2000 -- and this is not the conventional wisdom -- but you look back to 2000, the candidate who ran for -- on common sense gun issues was Bush more than Gore. Bush actually endorsed the assault -- President Bush endorsed the assault weapons ban, endorsed trigger locks and ran toward, in effect, the center on that issue because he and his people knew that that was the way to get votes.

And that might not have been the way he governed on the issue, but that's what he did as a campaigner. Common sense measures to make our communities safer is a good, law-and-order, Republican-Democrat politically positive issue.

MR. ZREMSKI: Which of the presidential contenders, Democratic or Republican, has the news on gun legislation that you feel most comfortable with?

MR. HELMKE: Actually, the candidates, at least on their past records -- almost all of them have been pretty good. Senator Clinton's been very good, Senator Obama's been very good, Senator Edwards in the past has been good. On the Republican side, Mayor Giuliani has been good on the issue. Governor Romney was in Indiana just last week and said that he felt a reasonable assault weapons ban made sense. Senator McCain endorsed the bill to close the gun show loophole in the past. So it's something that all of them have taken reasonable common sense step to support the measures that I'm talking about today. It's -- they haven't always talked about it the same way in terms of their primary campaigns, but I think we've got a lot of good candidates who've been good on this issue. And part of the challenge, again, is for the people to remind them of what they've done in the past and what they need to do in the future.

MR. ZREMSKI: Why doesn't the Second Amendment guarantee any -- that anyone can have a gun?

MR. HELMKE: There's a lot of legal issues about the Second Amendment, and a lot of them really came to fore recently with the case from the District of Columbia Court of Appeals in the Parker case, and that's a case that's going to be argued out further in front of the en banc panel, the 9th Circuit and probably the U.S. Supreme Court. And it's an interesting issue from -- what my lawyer had on. The last time the U.S. Supreme Court talked about the Second Amendment in the U.S. v. Miller case in 1939, they said that the purpose of any laws dealing with guns had to relate to the well-regulated militia

part of the Second Amendment. And that's been the Supreme Court precedent since 1939. Almost all court cases since then have taken that same point of view. There was one circuit -- federal circuit court case a couple years ago that took a different view, but the D.C. case is the first time a gun control act has ever been struck down on Second Amendment grounds. So the lawyers are going to be fighting all that out as to the value of a 70-year-old precedent, what do you do with other cases and what the intent of the Framers were.

My simple -- there's two simple responses I make, though, just sort of for the lay viewer, which is there's only one amendment to the U.S. Constitution and it has the word regulated in it -- and that's the Second Amendment. So, in my mind, that contemplates some sort of regulation -- and whether you tie that to just the militia or something broader -- it's still something that's regulated.

And even the D.C. Court of Appeals ruling said that reasonable restrictions are contemplated by the Second Amendment even under their view of it. So it's something -- we've got a strong First Amendment -- which I support, which we all support -- but we all know you've got libel laws, you've got obscenity laws -- you can't yell fire in a crowded theater. And regardless if you come down on the one side or the other on the Second Amendment, there's a strong argument that reasonable restrictions -- the sorts of things I've talked about today should be something clearly that are allowed.

MR. ZREMSKI: What are the main sources of funding for the Brady campaign today and what has changed over the years? And which are the biggest individual or organizations providing financial support?

MR. HELMKE: I've only been here 10 months so it's a little harder to figure out. We basically get our money from people like those who are watching and those who are here today. It's ordinary citizens who are writing \$10, \$15 checks and helping us out. We've got other individuals who can write some bigger checks and that's always helpful, too. And it's basically all individuals -- very few corporations, I think ever, very few foundations, but most of it are individuals that care about this issue and want to make this country safer and free from gun violence.

MR. ZREMSKI: Are you hampered given the fact that the other side has an industry that can support it?

MR. HELMKE: One thing a lot of folks don't realize is the people that send us money are the folks that care about victims, that work with victims, that want their communities to be safer. They don't make money off of this. The other side has -- represents the interest of the gun manufactures, of the gun distributors, of the gun dealers, of the gun paraphernalia makers, of the whole business that's gone up around that. And that's the difference. You've got people that make money on the one side and people that see victims and suffering communities on the other.

MR. ZREMSKI: Now kind of a hometown question: How would you assess the opportunity for promoting gun control in the Indiana congressional delegation? Specially, there are three new Democrats --



Representatives Hill, Ellsworth and Donnelly -- and are they amendable to supporting gun limits -- and if not, why not?

MR. HELMKE: I'm working on them. It's tough -- Indiana's a tough state. A lot of politicians are concerned about the issue.

Congressman Ellsworth was the sheriff of -- (inaudible) -- Country -- Evansville, Indiana for a number of years. I talked to him briefly last fall before he was elected -- people who have been in law enforcement see the dangers of this. County sheriffs have to get elected so they're always sensitive to how they talked about the issue, but I think particularly anyone who's had that kind of background with law enforcement is going to be open to at least some ideas that deal with commonsense restrictions.

Again, just as I mentioned, with the NRA with Wayne LaPierre talking about how we need stronger background checks, with the Bush administration sending down the bill last week that basically would say that if you're on the terrorist watch list that you shouldn't be able to buy a gun, giving the attorney general some control over that, Senator Lautenberg introduced that bill on behalf of the administration last Friday -- those are steps that are showing that other who have been typically looked at as not wanting to talk about more gun laws are now willing to do that. Because of that, I'm hopeful that some of the new congressmen from Indiana, as well as some of the older congressmen from Indiana might be willing to look at these issues, too.

MR. ZREMSKI: Please discuss gun violence in the workplace. What kind of policies should be implemented to keep firearms out of offices and is their need for federal legislation in this area?

MR. HELMKE: Workplaces are interesting -- I mentioned them briefly in the talk. Workplaces, owners of businesses know that they don't want guns in the workplace. They know that's part of their obligation in providing a safe workplace for their employees, they know that if you have more guns in the workplace, you're going to end up with more workplace shootings.

And I think those business owners have taken a reasonable step to prohibit guns in the workplace. The challenge they've got is that the other side has been pushing bills and state legislatures across the country to void those things. And it started in Oklahoma and that led to some lawsuits, it's something that just recently been in a few other states, including Florida and Georgia. The one interesting thing with this is that in Florida and Georgia -- two states where the NRA felt that they were powerful -- the committees there defeated the NRA's position even though apparently there have been a lot of political arm-twisting. I think it shows that legislators, given the climate post-Virginia Tech, even when they've been rated -- as they rated by the NRA realize that the public doesn't want to see more guns in their businesses, in their schools or in their communities. And that, to me, is a sign politically that there is some common sense. And I -- one of the things that's interesting -- this came up, actually, in Indiana about a year ago where they were pushing a guns in the workplace bill, and a number of conservative Republican

legislators that are friends of mine -- I heard them talk about it -- "Gee, this is a tough one: Second Amendment rights against private property rights."

And I think they realized that private property is one of the bedrocks of what we do. And to tell someone that they can't keep guns out of their business or out of their home or out of their school is ridiculous -- that you do have balancing and not everything is an extreme this way or an extreme that way thing. So we welcome the business community on that. I don't think we need federal legislation at this side. We just need the states just to continue doing what they're doing, which is allow the property owners, the business owners, to keep guns out of their workplace.

MR. ZREMSKI: Have you ever fired a gun, and would you ever consider having a gun in your house?

MR. HELMKE: I still have -- I have my NRA sharpshooter badges that I won at YMCA Camp when I was growing up. And I've got actually two of them. I've got sharpshooter and pro -- or marksmanship badge and a pro marksmanship badge. And to me, it was part of -- you went to camp, you learned archery and horseback riding and canoeing and sailing and riflery. It's -- I've got no problems with guns. I'm not anti-gun. I'm pro-safety. I'm pro-keeping our communities safe. And when I was mayor, I'd go to the -- I've been to the police firing range and fired some of the real heavy-duty semiautomatic powerful weapons. You know, guns don't scare me. Guns aren't something aren't something I particularly want around my house because I know that the guns around the house usually end up being usually used against people in the house or friends of the people in the house. They don't really protect the house.

MR. ZREMSKI: Okay, we're almost out of time, but before I ask the last question, I've just got a couple of other little important matters of business to take care of. First of all, let me remind our members of our upcoming speakers. On Friday, May 4th, Bobby Rahal, the racing legend, will be here to talk about "The Greening of Racing: Ethanol Powers the Indianapolis 500." On May 22nd, John Robbins, the chairman of the Mortgage Bankers Association will be here. And on May 25th, Dr. Martha Burke, feminist and former chairperson of the National Council of Women's Organizations will be joining us.

Next, we can't let you go without gifts. So we have the plaque and the much-coveted --

MR. HELMKE: Hey!

MR. ZREMSKI: National Press Club --

(Cross talk.).

MR. HELMKE: Okay.

MR. ZREMSKI: Thank you very much.

(Cross talk, applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: And the last question -- the last question is actually not about gun control, but it's about your law school classmate Hillary Clinton. Will she get the nomination, and if she does and if she wins, what kind of president would she be?

MR. HELMKE: It never helped me politically back in Indiana to have gone to law school with Bill and Hillary. I -- it -- (laughter) -- I always thought, you know, knowing the president, you'd think, would be a good thing. And I knew Vice-President Quayle, because he's from Fort Wayne. I thought, you know, I couldn't lose in the '92 election. I knew somebody each way. But after I started doing more -- when I ran for U.S. Senate in Indiana in '98, I kept saying, "If I'd known, I would have gone to Harvard or some place like that." (Laughter.) But it's a -- it's -- Hillary -- Senator Clinton is very smart. I think she -- she's very great, she's very good on the gun issue and I -- her husband was wonderful on the gun issue, and I don't like to get too much beyond that just because I've got an organization that's sort of a one-issue thing. But I think the country would be in good hands with Senator Clinton as well a number of the other candidates that are running. So, thank you.

(Laughter.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Very nice job. (Applause.)

Thank you.

I'd like to thank you all for coming today, and I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booze and Howard Rothman for helping to organize today's lunch. Also, thanks to the NPC library for its research. The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by the National Press Club Broadcast Operations Center. Press Club members can also access free transcripts of our luncheons at our website, [www.press.org](http://www.press.org), and non-members may purchase transcripts, audio and videotapes by calling 1-888-343-1940. For more information about joining the Press Club, you can contact us at 202-662-7511.

Thank you. We're adjourned.

(Applause.)

Thank you.

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