

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH SENATOR CHRISTOPHER MURPHY

SUBJECT: GUN CONTROL IN THE UNITED STATES

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THOMAS BURR: (Sounds gavel.) Welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Thomas Burr; I'm the Washington correspondent for the *Salt Lake Tribune* and the 109th President of the National Press Club. Our guest today is Senator Chris Murphy of Connecticut.

I would like to welcome our public radio and C-SPAN audiences, and would like to remind you that you can follow the action on Twitter using the hashtag NPCLive. That's NPCLive.

Now it's time to introduce our head table guests. I'd ask each of you to stand briefly as your name is announced. Please hold your applause until I've finished introducing the entire table. From your right, Tammy Liddell, freelance reporter and former Press Club President; John Welch, a senior account supervisor at Edelman; Will Lester, and editor at the Associated Press; Miri Cypers, Director of Federal Affairs and Partnerships for the Americans for Responsible Solutions; Dan Freedman of the Hearst Newspapers, Washington bureau; Clai Lasher Sommers, a fellow and survivor engagement leader for Everytown for New Hampshire; Mark Schoeff, senior reporter at *Investment News*.

Skipping over our speaker for just a moment, Jonathan Salant, Washington correspondent for MJ Advanced Media/*Star Ledger*, a former Press Club President and a Speakers Committee member who organized today's luncheon. Thank you. Kate Ranta, national spokesperson for Moms Demand Action for Gun Stance in America; Jason Dick,

Deputy Editor at CQ Roll Call; Peter Urban, a former *Connecticut Post* reporter and now a freelance journalist; and Ken Dalecki, freelance editor and commander of the American Legion Post 20 here at the National Press Club. Thank you all. (Applause)

Taking a moment of personal privilege, I'd also like to welcome in our audience today Andy and Barbara Parker. They're the parents of Alison Parker, a reporter for WDBJ in Roanoke who was shot and killed along with cameraman Adam Ward a little over a year ago during a live shot. Mr. and Mrs. Parker are now members. Would you please stand and be recognized. (Applause) Thank you for being here.

A Senate filibuster is usually designed to block a vote on a piece of legislation. But Connecticut Democrat Chris Murphy had a different goal when he orchestrated a 15 hour filibuster in June. Murphy's objective was to get Senate Republicans to allow votes on measures to prevent suspected terrorists from being guns and to require all gun purchasers to be subject to background checks. Weapons buyers can evade background checks by making purchases at gun shows and online. Eventually, the Republican leadership agreed and the filibuster ended.

While he lost those votes, Murphy had made his point, and Murphy has continued to make that point. In Philadelphia, he spoke on gun control at the Democratic National Convention, and he's promised to raise the issue again and again this fall with the White House and Congress at stake.

Murphy has emerged as one of the most vocal supporters of gun control. He hadn't even taken his Senate seat when a gunman began shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in his home state in December 2012, killing 20 children and 6 adults. Murphy served in the state legislature before winning election to the House in 2006, ousting longtime incumbent, Republican Nancy Johnson. When Joe Lieberman retired in 2012, Murphy won the seat. Let's welcome to the National Press Club Senator Chris Murphy. (Applause)

SENATOR MURPHY: Well, thank you Thomas. Thank you, everyone. Well, thank you very much, thank you. thank you, Mr. President, thank you to the National Press Club for hosting this really wonderful lunch here today. As I wrote in the guest book, I feel like I finally made it, my first and maiden trip as a speaker at the National Press Club. I want to join in your acknowledgement of the Parkers. I want to add an acknowledgement to Mark Barden of Sandy Hook, a promise, who's a great friend and leader on this issue. I want to thank those that are part of this head table today, Clai and Kate and Miri for all of the work that they've done with me and others to try to move forward this issue of gun violence.

I want to ask your forgiveness as I delve into some prepared remarks that I think are important. And then really look forward to answering your questions here today. So, December 14th, 2012, a day that everybody recognizes, it's a day for me that forced my political career, which at that point was 14 years old, to change course. That morning, I was standing on a train platform in Bridgeport, Connecticut, getting ready to take my

then-four year old and one year old boys down to New York City to see the Rockefeller Plaza Christmas tree, and I got a call that there had been a shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. And then I got another call telling me that there had been kids involved. And a few hours later, I was there at the firehouse adjacent to the school as 20 sets of parents, including the Bardens, were told that their children were laying dead on the floor of their first grade classrooms.

Sometimes in this business, you get to pick the issues that you work on. And then there are other times when the issues pick you. Now before that day, quite frankly, working on this issue of gun violence, it just was not at the top of my political priority list. As a congressman, I didn't represent any of the cities in Connecticut with epidemic rates of gun violence. But it's become my singular focus now as a United States Senator because in the wake of Sandy Hook, my eyes have frankly been opened to the catastrophe of gun violence in America and the inability to explain our exceptionally high levels of gun homicide with any data points but our gun ownership rates and our lax gun laws.

In nearly four years since Sandy Hook, the carnage in our streets has not abated. The mass shootings from Roseburg to San Bernadino to Orlando, they've continued. Gun homicides remain as regular as raindrops in our urban cores. And terrorist organizations, they now see the assault weapon, rather than the hijacked airplane or the improvised explosive device, as their primary opportunity for mass slaughter in America.

Stopping dangerous style military assault weapons from flooding our streets is now one of the most effective tools we have to combat terrorism. And so that's what drove me to make the decision to stand on the floor of the United States Senate for 15 hours to demand change. I was furious. I'm still furious that in three years since school, in three years of almost daily bloodshed in our cities, Congress has done absolutely nothing to prevent the next massacre.

Think about that. As our airwaves are flooded with news of horrific levels of gun violence in Chicago, of mass shooting after mass shooting, Congress hasn't done a single thing. But I also understand that my fury, or the fury of others over this inaction, it's not going to make progress. We need passion, but we also need to understand the reasons why the two sides on this debate are talking past each other. And that's really what I want to spend time talking about here today.

Here's the essential problem. From the center to left of the political spectrum, the conversation about guns in America is largely about the mechanics of how guns are regulated, how they flow into the hands of law abiding citizens and criminals, which weapons should be legal, and which ones should be illegal, what the data tells us about the best rules to reduce the number of crimes that are committed with guns.

On the left, our debate starts and ends with the concrete details of gun laws. The dysfunction in our dialogue over guns largely results from this conversation being totally foreign to those that inhabit the center to right half of the political spectrum. They are having a completely different conversation that has nothing to do with gun laws and

everything to do with abstract concepts of liberty and freedom and revolution. And how the discussion over guns is simply a prism through which to discuss these founding principles of our nation. On the right, the debate starts and ends in the abstract of these big ideas.

Put another way, the debate within the right is in the clouds. The debate in the left is down in the weeds. So it's no wonder the Democrats and Republicans have a really hard time finding common ground. If we're starting on different planets, then it's kind of hard to find a room that we can all sit down together in.

And so I break this problem when it comes to how the right thinks about guns into two modern realities. I want to spend some time talking about both. One is the increasingly anti-government, I'd call it neo anarchist bent of the Republican Party. And the second is this new economic model of the gun industry in America where a smaller number of people are buying guns, but in much larger quantities.

So let's take the first. The modern Republican Party, especially since the election of America's first African American President, Barack Obama, it's become increasingly hostile to government. Not hostile to inefficient government, not hostile to overreaching government, just government. And you can see why, frankly, because in an era where cable news covers politics as soap opera and villains and the ribald storylines get all the attention and all the ratings, there's a lot not to like about politics. Bashing government is big money these days. And Republicans, already the party favoring smaller government, are just picking up the dominant media narrative.

Second, in an era of unprecedented economic anxiety, many Americans are looking for somebody to blame for their plight. Republicans, not terribly excited to blame the private sector, offer government up as the culprit. This combination of the media just simply covering the dysfunctional storylines out of Washington, and the natural tendency of economic hard times to flow towards scapegoats, it pushes the right further and further toward hard line, anti-government rhetoric.

And that's how we get to guns. Because as kids in school, we were taught that no one hated the government, or at least their government, more than the founding fathers. They hated their government so much that they took up arms against it. They were willing to die for their anti-government beliefs and then after casting off their oppressors, they carried their anti-government beliefs into the drafting room of the founding document of this new nation.

The storyline goes that they wrote a section of this document that would assume that the oppression would return and that the guarantor of people's right to cast off that second coming of autocracy was the private right of gun ownership. That's not an unfamiliar storyline to a lot of Americans.

And so if you want to prove your bona fides as an anti-government activist as a Republican, then advocating for the right of the people to take up arms against their

government is kind of the coin of the realm. So in an era where anti-government positioning is the hallmark of the modern right, it shouldn't surprise anyone that increasingly Republicans are absolutists in their views on the right of citizens to own guns. They want to preserve the right of revolution as a means of showing how much they truly hate the current government administered by President Barack Obama.

And, of course, to be honest, guns are, in many ways, at the core of American mythology beginning with that story of a ragtag bunch of patriots running through romanticized ideals about the freedom of the wild west. Even if it is subconscious, the rights argument, it does have a seductive ring to many Americans who may not endorse the idea of armed insurrection against government, but nonetheless find this appeal to our founding ethos compelling.

And to be clear, the founders of our republic, they were concerned with defending against tyranny. And yes, enshrining the right to bear arms as an important element related to that concern. But an equally important defense against tyranny, or perhaps more given its pride of place, is the first amendment with its protections of free speech and freedom of the press and freedom of assembly.

But to show you how far our second amendment debate has drifted from the rest of our rights talk, there's no movement among first amendment purists insisting that laws banning child pornography or yelling fire in a crowded theater are a slippery slope to tyranny. And whether it's Hulk Hogan's lawsuit against Gawker or journalists being ordered to reveal anonymous sources, or our understanding of first amendment guarantees, it continues to evolve amid new technology and changing social norms.

Or take the fourth amendment's protection against unlawful search and seizure and the tension between privacy and security that played out in the struggle between the FBI and Apple. These are important, difficult questions that have immense bearing on the potential reach of government into our everyday lives. And members of both the Republican and Democratic Parties can, and often do, come down on either side of this question.

But that's not true of the debate over the second amendment. I did five town halls on guns in Connecticut in early 2013, after Sandy Hook. And in each one, I heard my constituents talk about gun rights as God given, parroting the recent words of a conservative writer who wrote, "We don't have the right to keep and bear arms because the Bill of Rights says so. Rather, the Bill of Rights says so because the right to keep and bear arms is intrinsic to our very being. It is a right with which we are endowed by our creator."

My point is that there is a reason for this mystical brook no compromise treatment of the second amendment within the modern right. It fits naturally into their need to become more and more extreme in their campaign to undermine the legitimacy of government. That's the nature of the modern Republican Party and much of the debate that exists within it.

But the second cause for this hardening of the right's position on guns, I think, is the changing economic model of the gun industry. Only one-third of Americans today are buying guns, and that number is dropping every single month. That's opposed to half of Americans who used to own guns 30 years ago; meaning that the gun industry is reliant on a smaller group of gun owners buying large caches of expensive weapons like the AR-15. The numbers of buyers have shrunk, so the simple solution, the industry has realized, is to just sell more weapons to the smaller market.

And so how do you do this? Well, you convince people that there are really only a few needs to buy weapons, but one of them, in addition to being able to hunt or shoot for sport, is all to protect yourself. You can also make guns a collectible and the dizzying array of models that have now been offered by gun makers has certainly turned gun collecting into a sort of hobby.

But something else is going on within the gun industry's marketing. The other motivation they feed for the stockpile of firearms is that same revolutionary theory that became, over time, so attractive to the Republican Party. The gun industry in cahoots with the gun lobby, the NRA and the Gun Owners of America, they've created a fantasy construct of a world in which citizens need to arm themselves against an out of control government. Instead of one gun, you need 10 or 20 or 40 so that you can arm yourself and your neighborhood when the black helicopters start landing in your backyards. Oh, and you better also stockpile a year's worth of ammunition just in case.

Now further, the industry's figured out in the wake of this increasing fear of domestic terror attack, gun ownership can be marketed as a way of protecting average Americans from the blast radius of violent extremism. The NRA counsels that every American needs a "security plan," which unsurprisingly means owning one or perhaps many expensive firearms.

And the reason Americans need a security plan is because, as the gun industry tells us, no laws can keep us safe. Now, this is another essential element of the gun industry's new positioning, the illegitimacy of law or government as a means to protect us all from harm. The gun industry's hope is that if Americans lose faith in the law's ability to protect the public safety, then the natural turn will be to a massive private firearms ownership.

Thus, the gun lobby opposes every single law designed to keep America safe from gun violence because to acknowledge the efficacy of any law would be to undermine the importance of guns. Now, how else can you explain the transformation of the NRA's positioning on background checks? In 1999, in the wake of Columbine, the NRA was prowling the halls of Congress pressing for an expansion of background checks, a very similar law to the one they fought tooth and nail to defeat in 2013. It's not coincidental that over this period of time, from Columbine to Sandy Hook, the industry, which provides a sizable chunk of the gun lobby's financing, changed. And to perpetuate itself,

it needed for the gun lobby to help create a new motivation for large sales of gun purchases.

This is the new reality in the right today, an absolutism. A complete refusal to engage in a conversation about gun policy because to do so would compromise the very notion at the heart of American freedom and American liberty as the unrestricted right to stockpile arms is used in case of emergency against a despotic government.

Which is regrettable, because even if you think the Supreme Court got it wrong in the Heller decision, when it held that the second amendment protects a responsible, law-abiding citizen's right to possess a handgun, the court still confirmed clearly, and unequivocally, that the amendment protects only a limited right. Just as Scalia said, "Nothing in our opinion should be taken to cast doubt on longstanding prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill or laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools or government buildings, or laws imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of arms."

And as clear as the law is today, the data is just as clear. And to me, this is maybe the most tragic part of this story, because the right is so captured, so imprisoned by this conversation about God-given rights and revolutionary rhetoric, that we all miss the fact that there are some pretty minor changes in our law supported by the vast majority of Americans that would unquestionably reduce gun deaths.

In Connecticut, we passed a strict handgun licensing law in 1995 that resulted, this is a Johns Hopkins survey, in a 40 percent reduction in our firearms related homicide rate. At the same time, Missouri repealed a similar law, which Johns Hopkins showed resulted in a 25 percent increase in firearm homicide rates. Forty-six percent fewer women are shot to death in states with universal background checks. Forty-eight percent fewer off-duty police officers are shot and killed in states with universal background checks. Two out of three gun deaths, they're suicide related, and states with gun purchase waiting periods have a gun suicide rate that is 51 percent lower than states without waiting periods.

Gun safety measures are constitutional, they work, and they're popular. And yet, they go nowhere in Congress time after time because the two sides within the political system are living on different planets when it comes to this issue. So what do we do? Or more accurately, what do I do as someone who's committed my Senate career to this issue?

And I'll lay out three things and then I'll close. First, I remind myself that all politics still is local. If the political force around anti-gun violence measures becomes strong enough, its will cannot be resisted. So we keep building up our grass roots organizations, we keep pushing more voters to elevate this issue on their priority list, and we work toward a day when the voters will force the right to moderate its stance on guns in order to win elections.

And that political transformation right now is playing out before our eyes. Anti-gun violence groups are getting stronger, their numbers are growing all over the country. For 20 years, though, from 1994 to 2012, the anti-gun violence movement was basically dormant in this country. And so it's had a very short period of time to catch up. But let's just look at two competitive Senate races to tell the story of how things have changed so quickly.

In Pennsylvania, incumbent Senator Pat Toomey is running on his support for background checks. One of his first ads trumpets his support for the 2013 compromise measure. When he originally ran in 2010, there was no mention of his position on guns. Six years later, it is a central part of his campaign.

In New Hampshire, with one of the nation's highest rates of gun ownership, Kelly Ayotte, Senator Kelly Ayotte's first ad of the campaign was in defense of her position on guns. Of all the issues she could have lead with on the air, she chose guns because she knows what an important issue it's going to be to swing voters in New Hampshire. And because also one of the grass roots organizations that I was talking about is strong enough that they raised the money to run two ads criticizing her position on guns early in the campaign cycle.

In New Hampshire, rewind to 2010, in Ayotte's first race when the exact opposite dynamic was in effect. Her Democratic opponent that year, Paul Hodes, was bending over backwards trying to get to Ayotte's right on guns, trumpeting his A rating from the NRA. Not this year, not a single Democrat this year is running for the Senate trying to cozy to the gun lobby. Times and voters have both changed.

Second, we have to take on the gun lobby head on and unmask it for what it has become, a spokesman for the gun makers, not for gun owners. Eighty percent of gun owners, even NRA members, support universal background checks. A higher percentage of gun owners than non-gun owners, some polls show, support closing the terror loophole. More political leaders need to call out the gun lobby's double game and make their endorsement a little bit less meaningful.

At the top of the ticket, Hillary Clinton's doing just that. Don't underestimate the importance of a major party presidential candidate asking for a mandate on the issue of guns and calling out the opponents of gun reform along the way. Some of the biggest applause lines for Clinton in her speeches are when she pledges to take on the gun lobby. And she isn't afraid to talk about this in unlikely places like North Carolina and Virginia.

And further, we're also getting some new unlikely allies within the Republican Party. During the debate that followed our filibuster, senators like Jeff Flake and Lindsey Graham, who both voted against background checks, by the way, in 2013, were very critical of those that argued for the status quo. "Every right has boundaries on it." That's what Lindsey Graham said earlier this year about the second amendment. I'm sure he would not have conceded that point two or four or six years ago.

And lastly, and this is the hardest part, we need to resist trying to remake the modern right. If they are moving towards a type of neo anarchy where everything the government touches is sullied ground, then we shouldn't try to think that those of us on the side of stronger gun laws can alone stop this march. The solution, then, also lies in Democrats moving away from our own safe space and recognizing that the right slide away from defending the legitimacy of government isn't going to magically abate, especially if a Democrat continues to occupy the White House.

We have to be ready, frankly, to meet Republicans on their space in the sense that we should be thinking about another outlet for Republicans to show their anti-government bona fides other than drawing a line in the sand on gun laws. Many Republicans in Congress that I talk to want to be more reasonable on the issue of guns, but they're stuck in a party in which their positions on guns is kind of a litmus test for how much you hate government. There have got to be other proxies to demonstrate ideological purity in this respect. And we should be working hard with sympathetic Republicans to find another path forward, not simply yelling at them for refusing to work with us.

Following Sandy Hook, former Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens said, "The law should encourage intelligent discussion of possible remedies for what every American can recognize as an ongoing national tragedy." That intelligence discussion, it is just not happening now. But rather than simply continuing to occupy our separate planets that time is now for those of us leading the charge to take on gun violence, to try to force us to stop talking past each other and to fix the bugs in the system that create that reality.

I'm mad that even in the wake of Orlando, the deadliest mass shooting in the nation's history coming on the back of Sandy Hook and San Bernadino and Roseburg, that we still couldn't get a background checks bill passed, or even a bill stopping those on the terrorist watch list from buying guns. But the filibuster and the sit-in that followed it did change things. It helped grow this political movement that is now more powerful than ever. It did cause Republicans and Democrats to talk past each other a little bit less. In the Senate, a compromise was reached on the simple idea that if you're too dangerous to fly, you shouldn't be able to own a gun.

And maybe Democrats are beginning to poke our heads up from the weeds of policy and Republicans now are occasionally willing to descend from that cloud of rights talk. Those two things are truly happening. The political infrastructure of the anti-gun violence movement getting bigger and badder, and the two sides of Congress finding new ways to work together. Then maybe it's just a matter of time before the laws of this country finally catch up to the will of 90 percent of Americans. Thank you very much for having me today. (Applause)

MR. BURR: Thank you, Senator. Just a reminder to those watching on C-SPAN or listening in, the public is invited to our luncheons here at the National Press Club, so the applause you hear is not necessarily from the journalists covering the event. Sir, let

me ask you first off, are you planning any dramatic strategy to put the gun issue on the front burner this fall like your June filibuster on the Senate floor? For example, are you going to try to top your record?

SENATOR MURPHY: Yeah, I'm very pleased that in the wake of the filibuster and the sit-in the momentum has seemed to have shifted on this issue. And I use Pennsylvania and New Hampshire as examples. But I think we have to be in the business over the next two months of the basic blocking and tackling of winning elections. There are some key elections out there that pundits and political prognosticators are going to look to when they decide whether or not guns was on the ballot in 2016 and which side won.

And so I'm going to be spending much of my time between now and the election traveling to states in which we have a clear difference between candidates for the Senate and the House on the issue of guns. I'll be spending time in the states that have referendums that will expand background checks. I point you to Nevada and Maine as two very important states, swing states, on this issue where we have referendums on the ballot.

I don't think that we're going to need to do anything extraordinary or noteworthy from a public relations standpoint. Right now, we just have to go out and win some elections.

MR. BURR: So let's talk about Pennsylvania for just a second because we have a question here about pointing out that Gabby Giffords and Mike Bloomberg are supporting Pat Toomey, and his race is very important in who controls the Senate. Will you campaign for his opponent?

SENATOR MURPHY: So if you are working on the issue of protecting Americans from gun violence, you have a lot of reason to think Pat Toomey. Pat Toomey did something that was exceptional in reaching out and working with Democrats on this issue. I don't just work on this issue. I work on lots of other issues as well. I'm supporting Katie McGinty and I'll be supporting her from now until election day because though I appreciate what Pat Toomey did on the issue of background checks, there are a lot of other issues in which I deeply disagree with Pat Toomey.

And so long as Republicans are in charge of the United States Senate, good luck getting these votes on the floor of the Senate in the absence of extraordinary measures like the filibuster. That being said, I don't think we are going to make progress on this issue if all we do is try to elect Democrats. I do think that we have to be honest about Republicans who have stuck their neck out and some of my friends get upset when I acknowledge that Pat Toomey did something that was mildly heroic when he worked with Democrats on background checks, but that's the truth. He did, and we should congratulate and applaud Republicans when they do work with us. I think we'd be fools to ignore the fact that ultimately we will get a quicker route to success by finding Republicans who are willing to work with us.

MR. BURR: You're pretty good at this filibuster stuff, so I'm going to start asking rapid fire. Which do you think is more effective, that all gun violence prevention organizations have their own area in which to work, or should we all work together for one objective at the same time?

SENATOR MURPHY: A lot has been made of the fact that we have a bunch of different anti-gun violence groups today that are all very strong. I think that's a great thing. I think it's great to have a number of anti-gun violence groups that sometimes have different priorities or different areas of focus. I think that that brings more, not less, people into our ranks because they don't have to fit themselves into one policy agenda that they can take a look at the Brady campaign, at America's Responsible Solutions, Moms Demand Action, Everytown, Sandy Hook Promise, and decide which one fits their model of advocacy the best. I don't think this is anything that hurts us. I think it makes us stronger.

MR. BURR: You alluded to this during your speech, but do you think there should be an overlap between the gun violence prevention movement and the Black Lives Matter movement where they can work together since gun violence does disproportionately affect people and communities of color?

SENATOR MURPHY: I struggle with what-- with what happened earlier this year that provided the psychological tipping point for the country. Why are you seeing in polls today that the disapproval rating of the NRA in swing districts is twice what it was a year ago? Why are Senate and Republican candidates all of a sudden running to talk about how strong they are on background checks?

I think that the combination in a short period of time of Orlando, Dallas, and the high profile shooting of black men in a few American cities became a tipping point. People just were consumed with this ongoing coverage of tragedy, and there was one thing that all of it had in common: guns. And so the idea that there should be no change in America's gun laws when all the bad news that you saw on TV had one thing in common, firearms, became unacceptable to people.

And so yes, I think you've got to marry the Black Lives Matter movement into the anti-gun violence movement because ultimately, this isn't just about police officers shooting unarmed black men. This is also about this country making a decision to allow for the flow of illegal weapons into the cities which results in the assassination and slaughter of young black men by others in the cities, not just by law enforcement.

MR. BURR: A question from the audience on that point. Doesn't the breakdown in law and order in some of the towns and cities, Ferguson, Baltimore, contribute to the promotion of gun sales?

SENATOR MURPHY: Well, there's no doubt that every time there's a mass shooting, there's a spike in gun sales. Again, because as I laid out, the NRA has

effectively proffered this argument that the only way to protect yourself is to buy more weapons, which is why it's incumbent upon us in the wake of these mass shootings when people are thinking about going out and buying a weapon for protection, to remind Americans that there's one could, hard true statistic; which is that if you have a weapon in your house, it is much more likely to be used to kill you than it is to kill someone trying to do harm to you. And people just don't believe that. They either don't know it, or they don't believe it.

And so there's no doubt that the NRA capitalizes and the gun industry capitalizes on these tragedies to sell more weapons. But, of course, every time you buy a weapon, statistically it is making you less safe, not more safe. And that's something that a lot of Americans don't know.

MR. BURR: Another question from the audience. Can you respond to threatened “consequences” to House Democrats for their sit-in on gun violence prevention?

SENATOR MURPHY: In terms of breaking the rules?

MR. BURR: Apparently the question was bad, they were threatened with some consequences for breaking the rules, some kind of sanctions or something?

SENATOR MURPHY: Well, they did break the rules. And so I don't know the details of House protocols and House rules and sanctions, but they did break the rules. And I assume that there's some sanction that comes with that. But, you know, everyone that's engaged in civil disobedience since the founding of the nation knows that there are often consequences that come with it. So I'm not one that's going to make a stink if there's some sanction against House Democrats for sitting in. The sanctions and consequences are in the best traditions of civil disobedience.

MR. BURR: So I think this is the most important question I could ask you, and the base question I think of all of our conversation. What would it take to get gun control passed in Congress if Sandy Hook wasn't enough, if Orlando wasn't enough? What is the impetus, do you think, that will take Congress to actually act on this?

SENATOR MURPHY: Right. This is the question that gets asked most often. And there's a famous Tweet that got re-Tweeted a million times. It says something like, America decided that the current rates of gun violence are acceptable the day that we did nothing in the wake of Sandy Hook. I don't buy that. I don't buy that for a couple of reasons. One, I think in the wake of Sandy Hook, this country was not ready to have a thoughtful debate on policy change.

Why? Because that tragedy was so psychologically disruptive to this country that all of our energy in the wake of Sandy Hook was spent just trying to reconcile how you square Sandy Hook with a just world in which at our essence we are still good. And I think it took a long time for Americans to just figure out how to emotionally and psychologically reconcile Sandy Hook with their lives.

And so I understand why it has taken a few years for Americans to become ready to plug into this conversation. I also know that it has taken a long time to get the political movement right sized so that we actually can change elections, we can actually change policy debates. The gun lobby had 20 years of run from 1994 to 2012. We've had three years to build this movement. So, I don't buy the idea that Sandy Hook should have just automatically flipped the political paradigm on guns. I think for a lot of really-- a lot of issues connected to psychology and a lot of reasons connected to pure logistics of organizing, it's understandable that it has taken us three years. And let's be honest, it might take us a few more years in order to get this done. But the momentum is heading in one direction and one direction only. And I think that's what you pay attention to.

MR. BURR: Let me just follow on that and ask, okay, you said a couple more years. In some ways, this is almost generational, isn't it? Isn't it going to take longer than two to three years to get something passed and for attitudes to change?

SENATOR MURPHY: You know, I don't think so. If you take a look at the number of Republicans that voted for the background checks bill versus the number who were willing to break with the NRA in the background checks bill in 2013, about double that number were willing to break with the NRA to support the compromise on closing the terror gap. Again, you're seeing a sea change in some of these elections.

I mentioned the flip on gun politics that's happened in a state like New Hampshire. I think this is not moving fast enough for many of us, but it's moving fast enough that we're not talking about a generational change, we're talking about a change that is going to take months or years, not decades.

MR. BURR: We have this in some degree with Michael Bloomberg involved, but do you foresee any super PAC-level funders willing to go fund gun control as an issue, sort of like Tom Steyer did with the environmental movement?

SENATOR MURPHY: Well, I think that Bloomberg and Everytown have made a commitment on this issue and I think Bloomberg will continue to spend a lot of money here. I don't know of any other individual funders who are willing to spend that kind of money. But as I mentioned, Americans for a Responsible Solution have made major ad buys in states already. I'm not sure that we can rely on that strategy. I think we're better off building our numbers across the country rather than trying to go out and find one or two more white knights who are going to spend millions of dollars.

MR. BURR: Another question from the audience. Why don't Democrats just focus on banning military style weapons such as AK-47s and the sale of ammunition for such weapons, none of which the questioner says are needed for hunting.

SENATOR MURPHY: So I think there's a long laundry list of policies that need to change, right? We went backwards for nearly two decades. And so I would add to that list the liability protections that the gun industry enjoys like no other industry. I

would add to the prohibition on research and development into the causes of gun violence that are currently in effect.

I mean, we have a long list of policy changes that we need to make in order to make this country safer. I hate it when people say, "Well, why aren't you focusing on banning assault weapons?" Well, of course I am, but you've got to sort of-- you got to pick the battles that you can win first, and order them in a way that is logically sequenced. I think our best chance right now is to get bills passed that increase the number of background checks in this country, and a bill passed that stop people on terrorist watch lists from getting guns.

I'm not going to stop talking about the need to ban assault style weapons. In Sandy Hook, you don't need to tell us what it would have meant if those weapons weren't legal and on the streets. It's just we've got to put some priority on things that we fight for.

MR. BURR: This questioner wants to know, do you think the GOP will be more willing to accept reasonable gun control, or gun control at all, if Donald Trump loses badly against Hillary Clinton this November?

SENATOR MURPHY: Yes, in this respect. Hillary Clinton is running proudly on the issue of changing our nation's gun laws. And there were a lot of skeptics who said that she was only talking about guns as a means of differentiating herself from Bernie Sanders, that this was just an issue that she was using to get through the primary. Well, that has not proved to be the case. She has continued to make this a part of every speech she lives, including the one at the Democratic National Convention. So she's the first candidate in modern times running very publicly on a promise to make changing gun laws a priority as president. And so there's no question that people will have to take a signal from her election.

I think what's more important is that in legislative races, there are a few signals sent that there are consequences for being on the other side of 90 percent of your constituents. So I'll, frankly, be looking more closely to the New Hampshire Senate race than I am to the presidential race when I'm deciding whether my colleagues on the Republican side have gotten the message that they can't oppose changes in our gun laws without some political consequence.

MR. BURR: So I hear you're an expert in this filibuster stuff. But if Democrats take over the Senate, would the party, would you, be willing to modify the filibuster rules to ease the passage of gun laws?

SENATOR MURPHY: Absolutely, yeah. No, absolutely. I have no plans, nor do I want to ever do that again. So, if the laws made it harder for me to flirt with standing on my feet for 15 hours, I would gladly accept that fate. No, so I am separate and aside from my decision to mount a filibuster, a supporter of changing the rules of the Senate. We have a rule now that says you have to effectively get 60 senators in order to pass any bill. I think our founding fathers are turning over in their grave seeing how difficult we

have made it to pass pieces of legislation on top of a system that they intentionally built as being very difficult to pass a piece of legislation.

They debated this issue of super majorities. And in the constitution, they specifically told us when a super majority would be necessary. Constitutional amendments, treaty ratification. And so it stands to reason that they thought about whether or not you should have a super majority for ordinary pieces of legislation. And instead, built a bicameral legislative system with a strong presidential veto as a means of making change hard instead of imposing super majority.

So no, I'm going to continue to-- and listen, I even as a member of the minority, have fought for the end of the filibuster. So I'm not going to be hypocritical about this and only advocate for it when I'm in the majority.

MR. BURR: We only have a few minutes left, but let me switch to another subject before I ask the final question. The 15th anniversary of September 11th is upon us, which had a direct impact on a lot of Connecticut families who lost loved ones who commuted to the World Trade Center. Where were you at the time, what lessons have we learned since 9/11?

SENATOR MURPHY: I was in a high school in Southington, Connecticut, when I was a state representative when I saw the initial coverage on a TV screen in the library there and then went home to watch the rest of it. I was a state legislator at the time. We've learned a lot. One of the things we've learned is that good laws protect us from attack. What we learned on September 11th is that our airports were vulnerable and the terrorists had figured that out. And so they were able to penetrate our relatively lax security at our airports at the time with box cutters and do great harm to Americans.

So what'd we do? We hardened our defenses. We banned certain things from being brought on airplanes, we constructed TSA and though they have attempted since then to penetrate our airlines to attack Americans, they have not been successful.

And so why aren't we learning the same thing now when Al-Qaeda operatives are stating clearly that lone wolf attackers should go to gun shows and take advantage of loose American gun laws in order go buy assault weapons to shoot civilians? That's what recruiters are saying. I can show you the video of one of the most prominent Al-Qaeda recruiters saying, "Here's what you do. You go to a gun show, you buy one of these weapons and you start shooting."

Well, why aren't we doing the same thing today that we did after September 11th? Today, terrorists are using assault weapons. They're not making improvised explosive devices. They're not trying to board airplanes. And yet, we refuse to change our laws.

So I think we learned in the wake of September 11th that good policy is good protection and we unfortunately are not using that when it comes to this new tactic of terrorist groups to take advantage of our gun laws.

MR. BURR: Thank you, Senator. Before I ask the final question, a quick reminder. The National Press Club is the world's leading professional organization for journalists, and we fight for a free press worldwide. For more information about the club, please visit our website at Press.org. That Press.org.

Also like to remind you about some upcoming programs. On September 15, Defense Secretary Ash Carter will speak here at the National Press Club. On October 3rd, the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, will speak. Also a reminder to our audience, please remain seated until the Senator has departed. He needs to make that vote and we don't want to make him late. I'd also like to present our guest with the traditional National Press Club mug.

SENATOR MURPHY: Oh, thank you very much. Hey, that's very nice.
(Applause)

MR. BURR: If you come back and do our spelling bee, I'll give you another mug. Last question, we typically do our last question as something a little more fun, so the movie, "A Haunting in Connecticut," was apparently based on a house you once lived in.

SENATOR MURPHY: Wow.

MR. BURR: Do you believe in ghosts, and what eerie things might have happened while you lived in the house?

SENATOR MURPHY: That is good research. So I moved into my first rental house when I was 22 years old with two friends from high school. And the second day, we had a plumber to come do work and he walked very tentatively up the stairs. And when he entered, we asked him what was wrong, and he told us that we were living in the haunted house of Southington. I won't tell you the full story, because you can find it online, but it was an old funeral home and the story was that the ghosts of the deceased had come back to haunt the house.

But as we watched the old videos of every crew from Entertainment Tonight to Inside Edition that had come to do a story on our house, we found out that it was only the first floor that was haunted, so not the second floor. And so I never experienced anything out of the ordinary in that house. But it was a wonderful welcome to Southington, Connecticut and it's been a great story to tell ever since.

Interestingly, some of the other houses in the neighborhood, when we moved in we thought it was odd, were painted purple and pink and apparently some people in the neighborhood took it very seriously and went to these ghost hunters to get advice and they were told that ghosts don't like certain colors. And so that's why some of the houses are painted strange colors. But no, that is deep, deep in my biography, so congratulations for finding that out.

MR. BURR: Well, thank you Senator. Thank you to the staff of the National Press Club and the National Press Club Journalism Institute, and we are adjourned.
(Sounds gavel.)

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