It seems like a decade ago (as does everything pre-COVID), but just this January in Iowa, Brady, the NAACP, and the End Citizens United Action Fund hosted “We the People 2020: Protecting Our Democracy a Decade After Citizens United.” We invited 13 Democratic presidential candidates. In total, six candidates answered the challenge, including Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.); entrepreneur Andrew Yang; former South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg; Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.); former Maryland Representative John Delaney; and former Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick.

Marking ten years after the U.S. Supreme Court’s Citizens United decision, we discussed candidates’ plans to end the dominance of dark money in politics, protect the right to vote, ensure fair courts, and create a democracy that works for all of us. We at Brady were thrilled to partner with and discuss these issues with the organizations and candidates present, as the history of gun violence shows how tremendously negative a role dark money -- particularly NRA dark money -- has played in blocking the expansion of the Brady Background Check System, despite the support of more than 90% of Americans.

In an agenda that seems strangely prophetic in retrospect, candidates discussed the importance of securing the right to vote for all Americans. As all of us now know, few topics have become more important as Americans grapple with a highly communicable, contagious, and too often lethal disease.

While COVID-19 obviously hampered Brady’s traditional methods of ensuring voter education and engagement, we quickly recalibrated. Together with Team ENOUGH, Brady partnered with March For Our Lives to launch #VotingAccessSavesLives, a campaign built on the understanding that to strengthen our nation’s gun laws and save lives, we must dismantle systemic barriers to voting and support civil rights advocates. We focused on eradicating racist and discriminatory voter suppression and intimidation efforts with one end goal: ensuring that every American has access to the ballot box in one of the most historic elections of our lifetime.

As if facilitating mail-in ballots and early voting wasn’t enough of a challenge, armed insurrectionists, emboldened by their intimidation of racial justice marchers throughout the spring and summer and empowered by a call from our president to “stand by” at the polls, also became a very real threat to a free democratic process.

Voter intimidation, including armed intimidation, is unlawful and fundamentally threatens our shared constitutional right to freely participate in elections. Under federal law, voter intimidation is defined as the use of threats, coercion, or attempts to intimidate for the purpose of interfering with the right of another person to vote or to vote for the person of their choosing. Brady partnered with powerful organizations in multiple coalitions to create a robust public resource informing voters of their rights — and how to protect those rights from infringement at the polls on Election Day.
While certain battleground states like Ohio, Florida, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Michigan saw Brady activists double down on their efforts, utilization of a new tool, Motivote, mobilized everyday advocates across the country to increase voter turnout this election cycle. Brady delivered important updates and information to gun violence prevention advocates on how to cast their ballots and ensure their votes were counted.

As the world turned upside down this year, Brady was ready at every juncture to ensure that Americans demanding a life free from gun violence could elect the champions needed in office to make that dream a reality.

2020 has been an election year like no other. Not only did it occur against the backdrop of the horrific COVID-19 pandemic, but the stakes for our country were high as voters went to the polls to finally elect a president who would embrace gun violence prevention as a critical public health issue, in addition to candidates down the ballot excited to enact life-saving laws.

The Brady Campaign endorsed nearly 200 gun violence prevention champions for office: 55 in state and local races, 143 in congressional contests, and one for the presidency. Brady was proud to endorse 57 women, 48 candidates of color, 19 veterans, and eight LGBTQIA identifying persons for Congress.

Even with the unjust appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court, a presidential administration that promotes armed voter intimidation, and a country reeling from dual epidemics of Covid-19 and gun violence, we are proud to have seen the victories of 100 candidates in the House of Representatives, 11 in the Senate, and 21 in state races, with more than 30 races still to be determined.

Brady was the first gun violence prevention group to endorse Vice President Biden for the presidency, and we are proud to call Joe Biden and Kamala Harris our next President and Vice President. Brady continues to serve as a critical partner in informing the new administration’s transition to the Oval Office, providing Biden’s team with executive actions that the president can take within his first 100 days in office. We look forward to continuing our work with the President-elect, long a friend to and champion of our visionaries Jim and Sarah Brady. In alliance with the House, Senate, and White House, we look forward to continuing to pass gun violence prevention laws that will save more lives from gun violence.

Freshman members of Congress ran — and won — on gun violence prevention in 2018, leading on the issue of gun reform in tough districts where, for so long, gun safety has been a third-rail issue. Not only did these candidates win their races on platforms that included gun violence prevention, but they have continued to lead on gun safety as congresspeople by keeping campaign promises to their constituents: voting to expand Brady Background Checks and close loopholes in existing gun laws. It’s actions like these, along with the sponsorship of life-saving measures like extreme risk protection orders, an
assault weapons ban, and increased funding for gun violence research, that illustrates a commitment to making gun violence prevention a priority. That’s why the Brady Campaign has endorsed 39 freshman members for re-election: we know they will continue to push forward on the issue of gun reform and public safety.

It is because of this demonstrated leadership that more candidates across the country are running and winning on gun safety. This election cycle, Brady has engaged with gun violence prevention champions and voters across Texas, Kansas, Pennsylvania, Ohio, North Carolina, and Iowa. These areas, once considered to be safe zones for the gun lobby, are now battlegrounds where gun safety candidates have experienced strong support. We may not elect a gun violence prevention champion in every race, but the infrastructure we are building in many states will help grow more candidates to run and win on this issue in the years to come.

Brady’s early involvement in the 2020 election was focused on these key areas where winning seats would be critical to maintaining a gun violence prevention majority in the House and to achieving a majority in the Senate. We were the first gun violence prevention organization to engage in a number of areas, working to garner early support for candidates strong on our issue.

It was this early involvement that was instrumental to candidates closing the gap in historically NRA-bought seats. While not all Brady Campaign-endorsed candidates won — and some races have yet to be called — these Senate contests were more competitive than ever for gun violence prevention champions. John Hickenlooper (D-CO) and Mark Kelly (D-AZ) both won offices previously held by NRA-backed members, flipping two key seats for gun safety.

The Brady Campaign’s endorsement efforts were strengthened by the Brady, Team ENOUGH, and March For Our Lives “Voting Access Saves Lives” campaign, which has worked to mobilize and engage supporters in the fight for a fair and equitable democracy. Brady’s work is grounded in an understanding that to end gun violence we must remove barriers to democracy and expand access to the ballot box. Amidst voter suppression, widespread fearmongering over mail-in-voting, and armed voter intimidation, Brady has provided support to endorsed candidates to ensure they have the best chance possible not only for a fair election, but to bring compassion back to Congress and state legislatures across the nation.

Faced with a global pandemic, the Brady Campaign quickly adapted its typical candidate engagement strategy to deal with the social distancing required by COVID-19. This included participation in more than 15 webinars with congressional members and long-standing leaders, like Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) and Chairman Adam Schiff (D-CA). The Brady Campaign leadership team was also proud to join our sister organization, Brady PAC, for their Biden Battleground series in support of Vice President Biden. These conversations drew upon the expertise of Brady, the insight of community advocates, and the experience of elected officials to create well-balanced and informed discussions of how a Biden administration would take action to end gun violence. These virtual events ensured that gun violence prevention remained front of mind even during uncertain times and helped to build a foundation for the work ahead.

While it’s already been more than a year since the Brady Campaign endorsed their first candidate for the 2020 elections, the most important work is still to come. We have maintained our hard-won gun violence prevention majority in the U.S. House of Representatives, elected two gun violence prevention champions in the Senate, and will soon have a president in the White House who is committed to saving lives by taking action against gun violence. Together, we can move forward to a stronger future.
It is time to end America’s gun violence epidemic.

The 2020 election was a long and taxing process that included a deadly pandemic, threats of armed intimidation, and efforts to suppress votes. In spite of all of this, Brady and allies for gun violence prevention remained vigilant, emphasizing a need to trust the process and count every vote.

We counted — and the people have spoken. They have had enough thoughts and prayers; they want a president who will work to enact real, life-saving change.

We have that leader in not only President-elect Joe Biden but Vice President-elect Kamala Harris as well, both of whom will work to restore decency to the White House and build on the people-first agenda that their campaign championed.

As part of its commitment to public safety, this agenda notably includes the most comprehensive gun violence prevention agenda in American history. A Biden-Harris administration is a win for the grassroots activists and concerned citizens across the country who have worked for years to build support for the common-sense policies we need to protect American lives.

As we move forward, the support of grassroots advocates and donors is more important than ever. While we now have leaders in office who are willing and capable to lead on the issue of gun violence prevention, they cannot do it without our help.

Brady has created a blueprint toward a safer America achievable under the Biden administration. It is our intention to work closely with the White House to do everything we can to make this blueprint become a reality. We know that gun violence, which affects every aspect of American life, is a complex problem requiring comprehensive solutions. One part of that solution is to strengthen and expand the Brady Background Check System, the critical underpinning of all gun violence prevention laws — but that alone will not end gun violence. To do that, we must address gun violence intersectionally in all its forms, including suicide, domestic violence, and the disproportionate daily impact of gun violence in communities of color.

With President-elect Joe Biden heading to the White House, we are more poised than ever to do this.

The 2020 election made evident once again that gun violence prevention remains a winning issue for candidates across political parties. We will continue to build and strengthen relationships with the many gun violence prevention champions elected in the 2018 midterm elections — champions who in 2020 ran again, mostly winning, their very competitive races on strong gun violence prevention platforms.

We will also help ensure that newly-elected gun safety champions deliver on their promises, not only by introducing legislation to prevent gun violence, but also by continuing to pass key bills out of the House of Representatives that are capable of gaining bipartisan support in the Senate — bills expanding the Brady Background Check System and enacting extreme risk protection laws, among other common sense reforms. It is these kinds of proposals that enjoy strong national support and allow new candidates to run on platforms of gun reform in areas of the country once deemed a “sure thing” by gun lobby-backed candidates.

We take comfort in knowing that the U.S. House of Representatives remains a gun violence prevention majority. We’re ready to continue passing life-saving gun safety legislation and hopeful that it will no longer languish in the Senate. Brady has a long history of resiliency. Jim and Sarah overcame great obstacles to pass the Brady Bill. No matter what lies ahead, we will continue to uphold that legacy.
The American people have been waiting far too long for federal action to prevent gun violence. While more than 90% of the American people support common-sense policies like universal Brady Background Checks on gun sales, we have seen years of inaction on bipartisan bills that could save lives.

While Brady believes that congressional action to keep our country safe is a necessary step and priority, it is also important to recognize the way in which the gun lobby and their friends in Congress have blocked meaningful action. If that path continues to be obstructed, it is vital to explore all options of securing the change we so desperately need. In the absence of congressional action, our other branches of government must step up to the challenge and prioritize public safety. This includes the executive branch.

Gun violence in the United States is a public health epidemic. Every single day, 300 people are shot and more than 100 die by gunfire. In such a case, it is well within the power of the President of the United States to take immediate action against gun violence via executive action.

We know that President-elect Joe Biden is committed to taking action that will save lives, and in our report “Leading with Action: Addressing Gun Violence with Executive Authority,” Brady has outlined a number of ways in which a Biden-Harris administration could do so, including efforts to improve enforcement, hold the gun industry accountable, and keep guns off our streets.

As a senator, President-elect Biden helped lead the charge for a safer America by passing the Brady Bill and the assault weapons ban, and it is only fitting that he once again take up the mantle of positive change to further advance gun safety across the country. Brady looks forward to working with the Biden administration to enact common-sense policies through both legislation and executive action. In order to accomplish this goal, we must first fix the Brady Background Check System, then work on addressing gun violence in all of its forms. The Brady Background Check System is the backbone of our country’s gun violence prevention laws. Since its implementation, the system has blocked more than 3.5 million prohibited purchases, yet 1 in 5 guns are still sold, no questions asked, without any background check at all. Action must be taken to expand this system and ensure it functions properly if we are to keep guns out of the hands of those intent on doing harm to themselves or others.

Beyond background checks, we must address the diverse and complex types of gun violence that impact communities in different ways. This includes, but is not limited to, community violence, suicide, and domestic violence. All types of gun violence require individualized approaches because their root causes differ; however, two things consistently cry out for improvement: the enforcement of existing federal gun laws, and the operations — and operational transparency — of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). We must mandate ATF accountability, and President-elect Biden has the power to do so. We must prioritize action that focuses on the source of crime guns and the ways in which they infiltrate communities — particularly communities of color — across the country. According to ATF data, a small percentage of licensed gun dealers are the source of most crime guns. In the name of profit, these dealers often engage in illegal or irresponsible behaviors. The president has the ability to take immediate action not only to ensure gun industry oversight and accountability, but also to identify and shut down irresponsible dealers enabling and profiting from the proliferation of crime guns.

As our supporters know, we simply cannot wait any longer for action to prevent gun violence. Every single day, more lives are ended, and even more are changed forever. We need decisive leadership to move forward and keep our country safe. That is why Brady is committed to working with President-elect Biden to identify executive actions against gun violence he can take in his first 100 days in office.