

Episode 52: An Epidemic and a Pandemic



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*****Brady legal music*****

JJ

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*****Brady musical introduction*****

JJ

Welcome back everybody to Red, Blue and Brady. Thanks for joining us today for an episode all about what happens when we've got an epidemic during a pandemic. You know how during the time of the coronavirus pandemic, can we be helping to end the epidemic of gun violence? You

know, I don't have those answers, but luckily, Christian Heyne, the Vice President of Policy at Brady and Mighty Fine the Director of the Center for Public Health Practice and Professional Development, just might.

Then, after our talk on everything from the American healthcare system to impacted communities, I've got an "Unbelievable, But" all about the good guys with guns narrative and schools. And in our news update, I'm covering everything from gun sales to NRA layoffs.

*****music plays*****

JJ

So COVID-19 is scary, and part of that is the news that surrounds it. From physical distancing that can lead to fears of social isolation to the worries about what an economic downturn could be and what it might bring. And all of those things can be made even scarier when we think about it in relation to, you know, increased risks of gun violence because gun violence is unfortunately a constant in the U. S. But there are things we could be doing in these times when both are intersecting to help ourselves and one another. To talk to you how I'm here with the great Mighty Fine and our old co-host pal, finally back, Christian. Can you two introduce yourselves to our audience?

Mighty Fine

Sure, hello everyone. I'm Mighty Fine, I'm the Director of Public Health Practice and Profession Development at the American Public Health Association.

Christian Heyne

And I'm Christian Heyne, I'm the Vice President of Policy here at Brady, and I'm so excited to be back on with you, JJ.

JJ

Oh, we're happy to have you back, Christian. Mighty as I think I've mentioned, Christian has really wanted to be back on the podcast again. So you're allowing that to happen for him? So he owes you one.

Mighty Fine

It's certainly my pleasure, that's for sure.

JJ

All right, so I want to jump right in. And maybe if you could tell listeners a little bit about the American Public Health Association. And, you know, if you guys have been busy lately for any particular reason, just doing some stuff.

Mighty Fine

Just maybe a little busy. Sure. So the American Public Health Association, or APHA, is a membership based organization. We have members in all facets of health and medicine, environmental sciences. So a really great diverse group. And we champion the health of all

people and all communities. We work to strengthen public health professions, rebuilding efforts. We speak out for public health issues and policies backed by science.

In 2002 we will be celebrating our 150th birthday, so to speak. So I think that speaks to our longevity and our broad and detailed perspective comes to all things public health. We work closely with members and partners to influence federal policy, ultimately to improve the public's health again through our collective efforts. The other thing I think I'll mention is I think what most people know us for, is our annual meeting. Which is one of the largest, if not the largest convening of public health professionals. And this year it will take place October 24 to 28 in San Fran. And I'm super thrilled.

Christian Heyne

Well Mighty, thank you so much for saying that that is really, incredibly exciting, not only your annual meeting, which sounds incredible. But, you know, I've been in this movement for a while and the inclusion of APHA's voice and really the public health community at large has been such a game changer for gun violence prevention at large. I think because of the comprehensive approach that you have to take when you're looking at public health and what solutions will protect Americans, what has it been like for you, sort of immersing yourself into the gun violence prevention space?

Mighty Fine

Sure. So coming from the public of perspective, I think one of the unique things we bring to this forum is that the public health approach really involves defining and measuring the problem, right? So what's happening and who is it happening to? What communities are most at risk? And so on and so forth. So it really helps us to determine the causes or the risk factors for the problem, but also helps us to recognize what are some of the protective factors or the things are making it less likely for gun violence or violence more broadly to happen.

Through this public health approach, and gathering all that information then better understanding and assessing how to prevent the problem or reduce the burden of gun violence and then implement effective strategies on a larger scale from local communities to state and certainly on the national level. I think the other unique piece of public health is again getting back to the risk factors and helps us to figure out what's happening right? So we may think of community level risk factors as diminished economic opportunities or underemployment, right? So then we have to figure out, ok what are some of these root causes? We know that violence is an endpoint right?

But figuring out what that trajectory looks like and how can we interrupt the cycle of violence along that. Whether we're talking about primary prevention, secondary prevention or even tertiary.

Christian Heyne

That's great. And I think you know, obviously everybody at home right now, I'm sure all of our listeners are listening and trying to adhere to as many rules as we can get from the public health community. But I imagine that, and just from talking to you, I know that the APHA has specific concerns beyond just coronavirus and what it means to sort of have these stay at home directives.

You know, when we're taking part in, you know, the act of physically distancing ourselves from one another to make sure that we're flattening the curve. I'm just curious What kind of things and issues and intersections with gun violence are the APHA and you yourself concerned with right now as we're sort of undertaking all those actions.

Mighty Fine

Oh, I think one of the things that APHA, considering all of the COVID dominance that we're experiencing right now is just broadly thinking about how do we still triage and manage all of the other competing priorities and also giving space and latitude to COVID-19 considering it's consuming us right now and rightfully so. But I think what we tried to do is look at kind of COVID-19 just talking about that for a second and thinking about ensuring that we have evidence based education to the public, the general public, but also to the field of public health, right?

So by having that education and promoting facts over fear, we're ensuring that we're focusing on the issue at hand and not to undermine that people are scared or panicking but again reminding them and us and public health to really focus on the things within the locus of our control and how we can communicate that to folks.

But also recognizing, okay, how does COVID-19 and this new, normal impact other issues, certainly like gun violence. One thing that we've been watching is the increase in gun sales and trying to figure out okay, not having much information on why these guns are being purchased. We have some information, but we can make some educated guesses as well and also recognize that some are purchasing guns who have been long time gun owners and some people will be first time gun owners. And so figuring out okay, what are our messages around that? Whether it's safe storage, whether it's suicidal ideation, recognizing that people are going to be spending more time in their homes and thinking about child abuse and domestic violence. So really kind of unpacking all of these competing issues and figuring out what that message should be to the public. And one certainly is again getting back to guns, thinking about social distancing, recognizing that folks are gonna maybe not have those interactions that they are used to having.

And if they were already experiencing symptoms of depression or suicidal ideation, how do we ensure that those populations are still getting the care and treatment that they need.

Christian Heyne

You know, I think you bring up a lot of important points, right? And even just public education. There's so much around this that we need to talk about through the public health lens right? People are running out to buy guns right now because of, you know, we see this, you know, even groups like the NRA are sort of capitalizing on this, out of fear and unknown, you know a lot of unknowns that exist out there. And justifiable too right? What you know, we don't know what the future holds, and we can understand wanting to have agency and being able to protect oneself at the same time, you know, it's really our job to make sure that we are also talking about what the leading evidence and research and epidemiology tells us about.

You know, if you bring a gun into your home, you are increasing your odds of being shot and that there are important, you know, responsibilities that you have as soon as you buy that gun like how you are storing that weapon, how you're storing the ammunition. Do you have children in the home? How are you making sure that you're preventing them from being able to have access so that you can prevent, you know, family fire? Something that we talked a lot about on this podcast. You know, how do we make sure we're encouraging family members to know that there're tools out there like extreme risk protection orders, for instance, where we can temporarily remove guns from people who are maybe, you know, experiencing that crisis you're describing.

Or, you know, we know that domestic violence is something that we have to pay close attention to as well, when we're when we're forcing people to sort of stay at home. That may not always be a safe situation. So there are a lot of things, as people are going out there and buying weapons. And I think having you know, the research and the evidence that comes out of the public health community is really what drives the things that we're talking about. Does that sound right?

Mighty Fine

Yes, certainly. You said a lot of what I would have said as well. And one of the things I want to point out is that around the time when all this craziness is happening around toilet paper and folks going out hoarding that I remember coming across a really interesting article written by a psychologist and he talked about, I believe he was [inaudible], and he talked about panic purchasing and this idea that people were buying water and toilet paper and all these things, maybe not necessarily germane to the pandemic. But his perspective was more so that people were trying to retain some level of control in a very uncertain environment. So that was giving them back that sense of control.

Like I have my toilet paper, I have my water, I have my gun if anything were to happen, right? So I think what leads me to believe is that there is a huge mental health component to this. So that's what we need to really be tapping into. And as you also mentioned, recognizing that we have to think about sticking to the facts and the science and, as you already mentioned recognizing, although we can assume that folks are purchasing a gun to ensure their safety and their home. We know that the research and data tell us that there are a lot more risks involved than protections when you have a gun in the home, whether we're talking about children accessing them or a domestic violence situation.

So we wanted to make sure that we're staying true to the science and the data and making sure that the public are informed in the midst of all the panic and fear and reassuring them and recognizing that fear and panic are not abnormal. But we also want to counter that with messaging and what people can actually do if they're feeling you know, down or or their social isolation is really bothering them in the context of having access to lethal means.

JJ

And in terms of protecting people in the public too I really want to take a moment and talk about, like, frontline health care workers and first responders and people of that nature who are working on the front lines here and I think, have you know, very valid concerns about COVID and things

and about their level of protection, but also their level of overwork. So namely, you know, that one public health crisis doesn't stop for another. And I was wondering if you could talk about, you know, COVID-19 and gun violence coexisting with the fact that we have an epidemic happening during a pandemic and what that means?

Mighty Fine

Yeah, definitely. And JJ, thanks for that big shout out to our health care workers and our front line workers and just folks in the service industry who are kind of keeping things afloat again in this time of uncertainty but certainly committed to ensuring that people are as safe as possible. Somewhere related to that, I think what this COVID-19 that's also showcased to us is to further demonstrate how fractured our healthcare system is and that we're not fully prepared to deal with our current health issues, let alone a pandemic, certainly of this magnitude.

And again, it's by no means of discredit or to undermine those working in the industry. But more so a reflection of assistance and corrections that need to happen. Whether we're talking about healthcare coverage, access as you mentioned, protection for health care workers to [inaudible] and ensuring that they have what they need to do the jobs as best as possible. To your greater point, we have to be able to kind of, ah, segment our work right? Recognizing that the pandemic is certainly important but also thinking about as we've been talking about where it intersects with current existing issues. And how do we triage them intentionally?

So we know that there are folks who are dedicated and working on COVID-19. But those of us in the gun violence and violence prevention space more broadly have to keep working on, you know, policies and supporting evidence based programs and ensuring that those issues don't get diminished or overshadowed by all the attention that's being dedicated to COVID-19 and just moving that forward, you know. We have ah, Congress just appropriated money for NIH and CDC to do some research and gun violence prevention.

So that was a pretty good win for a lot of advocates in the gun violence prevention space. So absolutely, you know, and just making sure that we're continuing on with efforts like that. So our advocacy can't stop our evaluation of our evidence based programs can't stop. So we have to continue and recognize and support what's happening with COVID-19 but also making sure that the mission that we have for those of us in the gun violence prevention space are still moving forward.

Christian Heyne

Yeah, that's a tricky balance, right? I mean, there is a lot of future planning that we are, we need to be prepared for and are preparing for. And to do that with so much unknown is tricky. So, you know, I think you know the research for NIH and CDC couldn't come quick enough because if we don't know how to tackle issues, we can't begin to find solutions for them. And I think that that's the most important part of sort of the public health approach at large, with regards to gun violence prevention right? It's holistic.

You are, we need public health to inform the root causes. We need public health to validate the solutions. We need to know what is working. We also need to know what isn't working. So that

we are, you know, when we have these limited resources that you're describing that they're being put to use the most effectively that they can, and the most efficiently that they can. So that is an incredibly important part of this work, right?

Mighty Fine

Yeah, definitely and I think one of the things that COVID has forced us to do is to be a little bit more nimble and more creative in how we gather, how we share information, how we connect, you know. And I think sometimes for those of us who have been working in these spaces for a while, we get kind of in our groove, right? And we maybe are not as creative or exotic as we could be in this work. And I think this is forcing us to do that. I think another great aspect that public health adds to this argument of kind of addressing pandemics and epidemics contemporaneously is that we look at shared risk and protective factors, right?

So whether we're talking about violence broadly, we know that suicide and child maltreatment, sexual violence, homicide. There's some shared risk factors, right? And there's some shared protective factors. So I feel when we're countering and trying to balance these competing priorities it's gonna force us to really look at these shared components of different diseases that we're looking at so that way we're able to address more issues simultaneously.

You know, I think of an example like, you know, that mentorship is certainly protected for gun violence, right? Or to delay or prevent a youth from engaging in antisocial behavior, right? So someone may be running some organization for mentors, right? But they may not call the work that they're doing gun violence prevention. But those of us in the field know that it is and need to do a better job of fostering and facilitating those partnerships again. So we're on one accord, certainly within our lanes. But recognizing that we can share resources to ensure that we're mitigating multiple adverse health impacts together.

JJ

Yeah, and I think one of the things that the virus has pointed out, or at least the US response to the virus, is how impacted communities, communities that are impacted by one thing are oftentimes impacted by a lot of things. So we're seeing gun violence continue sort of unabated in areas that also maybe have lower access to, you know, parents that have jobs that can telecommute or access to food, access to places necessarily for kids to go during the day. And so we're seeing vulnerable populations become even more vulnerable. And I was wondering if you could sort of talk with a public health perspective and maybe even Christian for you, from like a policy perspective, about things maybe our listeners could be doing if they're in those situations or if they wanna, you know, help these impacted communities

Mighty Fine

Sure, what I'll say is yes JJ, you pointed that out so eloquently. Certainly in our work at APHA, we do everything from the health equity perspective. So we really look at what's happening, who's impacted, who's most impacted, who's making the decisions to address those issues. And how are those that are most severely impacted involved in that decision making? So certainly with gun violence and particularly we're talking about neighborhood [inaudible] gun violence, you know there're a host of social factors such as unsafe housing, unstable housing, under or low

employment, low opportunities for quality education or educational attainment. So there's a confluence of this concentrated disadvantage happening in these communities. So if we think about these communities already, you're facing disinvestment and then compound that with a pandemic.

You know, not to make any assumptions, but certainly the work that I'm involved in, a lot of those folks that I work with are hourly wage workers. So if they don't go to work, they don't get paid. So they may be in a situation where kids are staying home because they're home from school and they still have to go out and work. So we have to think about those contextual factors and what's you know, what are the risks for kids who are home alone and all of those other kind of competing issues and really helping us to step back and say, you know, we have a lot of systemic issues in this country, and unless we address those root cause, any time some unknown threat happens, these communities are gonna be the one that are most adversely impacted.

And so we have to do more work on the program and Christian I'm sure you can talk from the policy perspective, but on both perspectives and make sure that people have an opportunity to live life to its greatest potential. But I think there has to be a shift not only in the policy, but we have to have a shift in our American culture. Where there's a greater appreciation for all lives? Irrespective of their social or economic status, the color of your skin, their sexual identity and I could go on and on to ensure that we have a culture that supports policy, practices that are making a shift and closing this inequity chasm.

Christian Heyne

Yeah, I mean, that was a fantastic answer Mighty and I really appreciate it. I think you said something, you know, while you were speaking earlier where you said that, you know, there's so many things that people are doing oftentimes just because they're trying to strengthen their communities and they don't consider it to be gun violence prevention. Whereas we know that sometimes that work, you know, engaging your neighbors, working closely with community leaders. There are a lot of these things that folks could be doing right now, when gun violence is changing in the face of what we're having to tackle here with COVID, right?

I will point folks to our website. I'm sure JJ will link this to the podcast, but we do have a link up that specifically talks about six ways that you can prevent gun violence while social distancing amid COVID-19. You know, so many of us are connecting family and friends, and that's incredible. You know, to a certain degree, we're doing this more now than we were before, and that can be a really powerful thing in and of itself. When we're doing that, you know, there's an opportunity here to talk about: do you have a gun in your home? Is it unlocked? You know, your kids are around a lot more, do they have access to it?

Some of these conversations and changing that culture are really important too. We know that we can provide assistance to somebody who might be in a domestic violence situation. For instance if we're if we get them the resources they need, like the information for the National Domestic Violence Hotline, we can have a real impact there, too. So there's a lot of things that people could be doing at this time, and some of it is just talking. Some of it is proactively engaging and using the tools that we've developed in policy. Sometimes it's just being a good friend and family

member, and I think all of this we should consider to be a part of the same approach to preventing gun violence, right?

Mighty Fine

But it's sometimes just simply asking a lot of the community work that we do sometimes, or, I should say, formally go in with these great ideas, have this prepackaged program, get to the community and like dude what are you doing? That's gonna be so ineffective here, right? So instead of taking that strategy, we've learned by asking, you know, and getting them involved intentionally. So I would say, ask your neighbors, you know, this is a great time to get to know them if you don't already know them and ask them, how can I help? You know, and think about what you're in a position to do. Again, it may be like childcare services, someone to talk to, but then bringing us back to what Chris mentioned this is another opportunity to ask folks about, you know, guns in your home. If you have to go to work, you may be leaving your kids with a neighbor. It's an opportunity for you to start that conversation.

And really, for us to get past this idea that guns don't really exist, right? We know that they certainly do. You know, they're certainly in our environment. And so I think it's time for us to be a little bit more proactive when it comes to that, particularly involving children and making and normalizing the conversation. You know, whether you're a friend with a gun in a home, a family member, but really normalizing the idea that we can ask someone about that for their protection, our protection and certainly the protection of children.

Christian Heyne

I want to tackle the really important thing that you mentioned earlier, too, about just about leaning into technology in general. And how we, we do have this opportunity, you know, this is a wild sort of not experiment, but a situation that we're dealing with, right? This public, this global pandemic. But having all this technology, you know, oftentimes we see it as a curse I think but there are times like right now where it is such a blessing to be connected. My family's out in California, I live in Washington, D. C. To be able to connect and have them in the room with me and, uh, you know, engage with them. Our team had a happy hour, I promise it was in moderation. But we had, you know, a lot of fun things that we can do. I wonder, you know, what sort of things can people lean into maybe listeners who are having a tough time right now that are listening to this right now. What kind of things and steps can they take?

Mighty Fine

Sure, so I'll start with the first one of the second part of that. And I think that people should ask others. How they're feeling and just doing some internal checks is what one of things that I've been practicing is actually taking a break for watching and reading or listening to the news. I feel like I turn the TV on, turn my phone on, I'm getting a message from a friend, a family member or watching news, or watching Dr. Fauci talk about the newest developments. And I feel like while it's important for us all to be informed, sometimes the repeated inundation with that information can be upsetting or just not as healthy for us. So I definitely think folks should practice minimizing their access to that information while staying informed. And then just make time to chill out, and unwind to do other activities.

JJ

That being said Mighty, I would love to chat, um, a little bit about how again to come back to that, you know, we've got an epidemic during a pandemic, what can folks at home, listeners be doing besides listening to this podcast? And, you know, following everything that the CDC tells them to do?

Mighty Fine

In regards to COVID, I would say one of the, and now that you mention CDC...

JJ

Or you know both COVID and gun violence. I'm assuming if you had solutions to all of these things Mighty, that we probably...

Christian Heyne

Wait, wait, Mighty, do you have solutions to all of these things?

Mighty Fine

I mean, if I did, we would not be talking.

JJ

That's what I mean. like I feel like you would be in Geneva on a golden throne.

Mighty Fine

With people like lifting me up right?

JJ

Yes. I mean, that still could happen. You have a good day for it, to be perfectly honest.

Mighty Fine

Okay, that I've been reading about manifesting. So it's a manifestation that this will happen. I think, uh, one of things, just gun violence in particular. I would say, as you're able to continue in that I don't want to say fight, but let's say fight right? We know that we have a lot more, we've made some great strides, but there's a lot more that can be done on the policy front. Certainly on the programming front and normalizing conversations around mental health, mental well-being.

And one of things that I've done in my work is, you know, someone who has witnessed someone attempting a suicide and seeing someone be shot. It's like I recognize that as an epidemiologist, I love numbers and I love number crunching, right? But I take a step back and recognize that that one life is connected to so many other lives and has such an echoing impact just from that one death or that one injury.

So I tried to think about it in that perspective, so that we are as a global community recognizing that even if I haven't had any interaction with violence personally, I'm part of that solution because it's impacting me one way or another. So I guess what I would say in that regard is for folks to really hunker down and stay studying the work that they're doing in this arena and

recognizing that the work that they're doing is necessary. And, you know, the optimist that I am, I look at COVID-19 as temporary, you know, there are folks working on vaccines and treatments and solutions. And we need to take that same fervor and energy with gun violence prevention, right?

We need to continue pushing the needle and showing that we have policies in place, programs in place to continuously address this epidemic that maybe doesn't always get the amount of attention that it certainly deserves because people can't picture themselves as being part of the problem or solution. And we want to change that dynamic.

JJ

This had come upon on the podcast that they came out Ah, a little bit ago that we did with the fine folks at the American Association of Suicidology and their fear that we were going to see possibly you know, no one wants to try to predict, but that we might see an increase in suicide. We might see an increase in domestic violence cases. We certainly are at risk of seeing an increase in family fire. And I was wondering if y'all have any of the similar fears, that we might be seeing an increase.

Mighty Fine

Yes, we have this. We do have similar concerns, and obviously it's too early to predict. But recognizing that these are risk factors, you know, staying true to public health, we want to get ahead of it, right? So part of that is educating folks on you signs to look out for providing them with tools and services. And resources that help triage those feelings that they're having or figure out ways to mitigate internal family violence or family fire. So I think yes, we do share those same concerns.

But we, uh, take the approach of trying to get ahead of it and thinking about what services, resources and messaging we need to get in front of that or kind of right now in order to avoid some of those adverse health outcomes. Because I think we would be, it would be imprudent of us to not think that the suicide is a possibility of what people are expressing and experiencing during this time. That goes for interpersonal violence as well, when we have these messages and maybe have people fearful over resources and we know that the lack in this investment again are causes of violence.

JJ

Do you have any concerns too that the economic downturn in particular is going to cause issues further out too, I know that that's sort of the thing people are looking forward to the crisis in addition to all of the lives lost and impacted. Now, you know, months from now, when maybe people still haven't been able to return to work. And obviously the cost of healthcare in the U.S., that's a podcast for a different day.

Mighty Fine

Yes, absolutely. I think that's one of the things that this again has showcased to us, is that access and affordability. And I think the U.S. has some of the most expensive healthcare costs probably in the world, honestly, certainly among developed nations. And there are a whole host of people

who don't have access to those services for a multitude of reasons. I think certainly in the media we're seeing that already, some of the hourly wage workers are being let go. And thinking about how that's gonna impact themselves and their families. So I think we've only just begun to see the impact of that.

And our kind of elected officials are gonna have to be really strategic and how they address that. I just think that we, as advocates in this space have to really force our elected officials to pay attention to some of these marginalized populations who are often discounted and services that they really need go unfulfilled. And I think with this pandemic and folks being out of work and all the other kinds of social factors that are coming along with it, I can't see it getting any better. I think it's gonna get worse and it's gonna really force our elected officials and us advocates to really make sure that our most vulnerable populations have their basic needs met. Excuse me So they can again just live a normal life like everyone else.

You know, recognizing that priorities need to be made and there's nothing wrong with identifying those who need more in fulfilling that gap. And I think as we think about whether we're talking about the response to COVID-19 or gun violence prevention we have to think of, uh, you know, responses and solutions along the continuum. So it's what I can do personally to ensure that I'm at my highest self. Meditation, mindfulness certainly assists in that. You know, how can I assist my community, how can I engage with them? How can I return back to them? What are some of the policy levers that I need to be advocating for to ensure that the systems and structures are in place to support an inclusive environment that appreciates us all as we come?

I'm happy to participate in all aspects of that because gun violence is certainly something I'm certainly passionate about. And I recognize that not one sector solely can contribute that we have to bring in a host of sectors a whole host of folks with varying thoughts and ideas to really see any true or not true but any continued prevention in this work, so certainly aligned with meditation as an area focus when we're feeling a little off. I'd also mention that CDC.gov, [inaudible], APHA's Get Ready campaign.

Also, three great resources that have information about coping on some information about mindfulness again. Information about telehealth. If you can't get to your doctor or your counselor, how can you still receive the service? And then again, just figuring out how we can help each other in this time of need, again, whether we're talking about COVID-19 or gun violence in specific.

JJ

Alright, well, thank you both so much.

*****music plays*****

JJ

Now in this week's "Unbelievable, But" section we're headed to Florida.

Pre-COVID, The South Florida Sun Sentinel revealed that their school district is struggling to comply with states recently added requirement that every school have a quote, a good guy with a gun end quote. So among some of the problems in Hillsborough County, the designated good guy with a gun thought her weapon was unloaded when she shot through a mirror as she practiced her quick drawing skills and another officer outside Orlando, pawned his service weapon and ballistic vest, and was found out only when a supervisor discovered he was carrying a toy gun in his holster.

Seriously, you cannot make this stuff up.

*****music plays*****

JJ

Now, while almost all the news has been focusing on COVID, we're here with the unfortunate reality that gun violence continues.

So in Baltimore, there's been 62 homicides so far this year. The city has also seen 125 nonfatal shootings so far this year, compared with 123 this time last year. So not a lot of change, and that's not good. Candidates in the city's mayor race are weighing in on the topic with ideas of what can be done to curb this violence. But one mayoral candidate, TJ Smith, drew attention to the racial disparity here, saying quote, we know when we talk about this gun violence epidemic that if you're young and black, you're most likely going to be affected by it. End quote.

Meanwhile, gun and ammo sales continue to rise. Concern about the accelerating spread of COVID-19 has caused a spike in sales, according to sellers and data from sources like the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System, which saw a doubling of checks on applicant buyers last week. As more and more states have moved to what they're calling the shelter in place orders, debates over whether or not gun stores count as essential businesses or not, have begun.

On Sunday, the U. S Department of Homeland Security issued guidance on the issue, naming gun stores as essential critical infrastructure. Now, previously some states, like New Jersey, had officials shut down the gun background check system instead of just telling stores to close, which rendered gun sales through federally licensed dealers pretty much virtually impossible.

But it's important to know that one in five guns is sold through other avenues, not requiring background checks, so that wasn't impacted by this shutdown.

At the same time, the NRA has said that they're having to lay off staff and institute pay cuts because of the coronavirus. Wayne LaPierre, the National Rifle Association CEO, informed the NRA's board of directors and Executive council that because of quote, extraordinary challenges end quote resulting from the pandemic, certain positions are being eliminated. Hourly employees are getting a four day workweek and staffers will endure 20% pay cuts. Earlier this month, concerns over the virus forced the gun group to cancel its annual meeting in Nashville.

In a statement, the NRA's outside counsel said the outbreak had caused a major disruption to our fundraising activities. End quote. He added that pay cuts would apply to all levels of the organization. Just gonna throw it out there though, LaPierre's total compensation in 2018, the last year for which tax filings are available, was 2.15 million.

*****music plays*****

JJ

Thanks for listening. As always, Brady's life saving work in Congress, the courts and communities across the country is made possible thanks to you for more information on Brady or how to get involved in the fight against gun violence, please like and subscribe to the podcast, get in touch with us every day, at Bradyunited.org or on social @Bradybuzz. Be brave and remember, take action, not sides.

*****Brady musical outro*****

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