

Episode 39: History in the Making



National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255.
Music provided by: David “Drumcrazie” Curby
Special thanks to Hogan Lovells, for their long standing legal support
©&©2019 Red, Blue, and Brady

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

JJ

Hey, everybody. This is the legal disclaimer, where we tell you the views, thoughts, and opinions shared on this podcast belong solely to the person talking to you right now, and not necessarily Brady or Brady’s affiliates.

Please note, this podcast contains discussions of violence that some people may find disturbing. It’s okay! We find it disturbing too.

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

JJ

Hey everybody. This is the legal disclaimer where we tell you that the views, thoughts and opinions shared on this podcast belongs solely to the person talking to you right now, and not necessarily Brady or Brady's affiliates. Now, please note this podcast contains discussions of violence that some people may find disturbing. It's okay! We find it disturbing, too.

JJ

Hey everybody, welcome to an extra special Monday Minisode! Now, today I am joined by the amazing Kris Brown and the phenomenal Lori Haas to talk about the Virginia Senate Judiciary Committee, which may not sound super exciting at first but is because it's been years since significant gun violence prevention legislation has even cleared committee in the state of Virginia. So this is huge. And honestly, the rest of the country should be really paying attention because it was only in November of 2019--so only a few months ago--that Virginia voters altered the balance of power in Virginia, and they did that by electing a gun violence prevention majority to the state legislator. Something, that you know I think, if you ask Virginians a few years ago, they would have said was highly unlikely. And yet here we are. It's great that both Kris and Lori able to even be with me on the phone. I know Kris is dashing from meeting to meeting. From what I've heard, Lori is hiding in the hallway outside the committee room where she was all morning. I'm in a car, but, you know, we thought it was really important that all of you listeners out there really get a sense of the super important work that's happening in Virginia and then hopefully across the United States. But you don't wanna hear me pontificating. I'm sure that you want to hear from the people who were in the room when it happened. So on that note, let's jump right in. Lori, can you introduce yourself to our listeners?

Lori Haas

My name is Lori Haas. I work for the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence and the Senior Director of Advocacy and the State Director for Virginia.

JJ

Kris, can you introduce yourself as well?

Kris Brown

Sure. Hi, this is Kris Brown, I'm the president of Brady.

JJ

So can you tell our listeners what happened in Richmond today?

Lori Haas

Senate Judiciary, formally known as Senate Courts, met this morning their first committee hearing for the 2020 session and as expected, and as the voters demanded on November 5th, they begin to vote on common sense gun laws, bills that we have put in front of the Virginia Legislature for many years, and we were able to pass them out of committee this morning.

JJ

And that, I think, is just phenomenal, that we're starting to see gun violence legislation getting passed. And so what were the bills in particular that were up for a vote?

Lori Haas

Background checks, extreme risk protective orders, a locality control bill and a return to the one handgun per month purchase limit.

JJ

And Kris, I'm wondering if you, but I mean obviously Lori you know this inside and out, too. If both of you could speak to, you know, why these bills actually matter so much?

Kris Brown

Well, obviously, Virginia has had horrific gun violence. It's no different from many other states, but Virginia Tech massacre, Virginia Beach not that long ago, and many, many you know, large scale shootings in between. In addition to the everyday gun violence and the kinds of bills that are now making their way out of the Senate with more to come, our common sense measures as Lori said, that meaningfully expand the Brady background check system and that put reasonable restrictions entirely consistent with the Second Amendment just to ensure that our Commonwealth of Virginia is more safe. They're a long time in the coming, but I'm very proud that the state is now poised to enact these measures.

Lori Haas

As Kris mentioned, you know, these are things that the voters and citizens of the Commonwealth have demanded for years and years and years. This is, you know, stuff that has been pent up in the Legislature, you know, with an artificial majority because of gerrymandered districts. And and now that we've had an election that reflects the will of the people, these, these measures passed out of committee.

JJ

I mean, you both sort of alluded to this, but this was actually a pretty historic day. And it's not even two pm as we're recording. You know why? Why is this such a I think an important matter, not just two Virginians, but nationally?

Lori Haas

Well, Virginia leads the way in a lot of issues we, you know, we're long considered, you know, a red state then a purple state and now a blue state, and we understand that states with strong gun laws have fewer gun deaths, and Virginia would like to be one of those states. We want strong gun laws so that our citizens in the Commonwealth can have less gun violence and less tragedies like shootings. You know, as Kris said, we see gun violence every single day in the Commonwealth. Over three people a day will be shot and killed and many more injured. And we know that combined, you know, there's a complement of policies that need to be in place that can begin to reduce gun violence. It's about saving lives.

Kris Brown

And if I could just amplify that point, which I think is so important that Lori is making this did not happen overnight, right? I mean, the fact that we've had these bills pass out of the Senate committee is new to us, but this took a long time to come. Ultimately, this is about people showing up about people going to the ballot box about people raising their voices and changing the outcome. If people hadn't come and we didn't have gun violence prevention legislators running for office and winning, Lori would not be reporting out what she's reporting out right now. And so I think it's really important for listeners to understand, even when things seem

tough, raising your voice, getting involved, making a difference and going to the ballot box really do matter. We're proof positive of that.

Lori Haas

Absolutely. Kris, that makes a great amount of sense. I think that because of the constituents work across the Commonwealth by many, many people who care about this year in and year out raising their voices, you know, the frustration level mounted and that moved voters to vote on this issue specifically and poll after poll said that. Those who came to the polls in November were voting on gun violence prevention measures. Their vote was a mandate to those elected to do something about gun violence and to pass common sense measures to keep people safe.

Kris Brown

And J.J. If I if I could just say, from my perspective, Lori Haas is is a living embodiment of precisely what we're talking about here. Lori obviously is an incredible advocate for gun violence prevention, someone who is known by every lawmaker and in the Commonwealth of Virginia whose opinion has helped mold really the what we're seeing here, but she's also a mom, and I wonder if you might take a minute just to describe your journey in this cause, Lori.

Lori Haas

Sure, you know, today is historic and it's significant, and it's fairly emotional for me and for others who have been doing this work. But specifically on the morning of April 16th, 2007, you know, which is almost 13 years ago, I got a phone call from my daughter and, you know, can't describe the feeling. But she said: "Hi, Mommy I've been shot." And, you know, to our great fortune on on some level, you know, she was injured. She was, you know, not seriously injured. And she recovered. And she's doing well today. But there were just too, too, too many of her classmates and professors who were killed that day as my husband and I drove to Southwest Virginia to get to the hospital where they had taken her. You know, the radio is reporting, you know, six dead, ten dead, twelve dead, fifteen, eighteen. You know, the numbers are climbing and, you know, we're stopping for those parents who were making that same drive to pick up their dead children. So it's, it is personal to me. It's what catapulted me into this arena and into this work. And, you know, I'm at it today, I'm not going away. You know, I'm committed to the work. I'm committed to doing what we can to save lives. You know, and I'm just glad today is finally here, we have more work to do. We're not going away. We're going to shepherd these bills through the Senate and through the Senate floor and votes, and we're going to shepherd them through the House and the House committees, and we're going to get the best package of bills that we can. The Governor is committed to this. His package of eight bills is broad. It is, they complement each other. You know we can have a prohibition, you know, for somebody who's a respondent (?) in an extreme risk protective order or in a certain type of domestic violence orders. But if they can circumvent, go out and buy any gun they want anywhere they want on a street corner, you know, what good are we doing? So they complement each other, they help law enforcement, they help victims of gun violence, and we feel strongly about this package that the Governor has put forward, and we're going to do everything we can to make it pass.

JJ

And Kris any final thoughts as a Virginian, what does this mean to you?

Kris Brown

Well, I mean, look, I grew up in the Commonwealth of Virginia. I spent my formative years on the campaign trail because my mother ran for office, albeit unsuccessfully, twice to be a member of the House of Delegates. And Ah, Virginia for a long time was a state that people said would never be in a position to pass gun violence prevention measures. I'm also a graduate of Virginia Tech myself and knew professors who were in the buildings where that horrific shooting happened. And like so many people, this is not an abstract issue. This is personal. It's deeply personal to all Americans in the end, but certainly for those of us who are involved in this cause. And I'm incredibly proud that voters showed up that we had so many incredible individuals run with passion and enthusiasm for public safety and for doing the right thing by the Commonwealth of Virginia and its citizens and enacting these measures, and I'm really proud that we're well on our way to be, I hope, a beacon and a shining light in this country for saving lives. That's what we should be.

JJ

So then, for people who are new Virginians, oh, my goodness, only five months ago, what can, you know, gun violence prevention advocates who are new or, you know, what can we do to ensure that these bills continue moving forward or to continue that other bills continue moving forward.

Lori Haas

Well, it's certainly in a democracy, every voice counts. And I think that your listeners should be contacting their Senators from any, any part of the Commonwealth. You know, speak up, make a phone call, send a letter, come visit. You know, we have committee hearings and subcommittee hearings. Everybody is welcome. Those are listed on the calendar. If people go to the Virginia General Assembly website and they could look at the L.I.S. calendar and all the committee meetings and subcommittee meetings are, are there. I hope that you know, everybody listening uses their voice to support these.

Kris Brown

I would also add everything Lori said, absolutely. I mean, as as many smarter people have said before me: democracy, especially today, is not a spectator sport. So getting involved calling. (NOISE?) Also, many of the members of the House of Delegates and the Senate have town hall meetings nearby. I was able to go to one over the weekend, right in Arlington. Look for those opportunities to engage with lawmakers directly and make sure your voice is known. That makes a big impact.

JJ

Well, so thank you both so much for calling in. I know that it's been a a crazy day already, so I really appreciate it.

Lori Haas

Thank you.

Kris Brown

Thanks so much, Lori.

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

JJ

Thanks for listening. As always, Brady's lifesaving 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 at bradyunited.org, or on social [@bradybuzz](https://twitter.com/bradybuzz). Be brave, and remember: take action, not sides.

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

Selected citations:

“Historic Step Towards Common-Sense Gun Safety Laws in Virginia.” Brady. Accessed January 17, 2020.

<https://www.bradyunited.org/press-releases/brady-celebrates-historic-step-towards-common-sense-gun-safety-laws-in-virginia-during-second-week-of-legislative-session>.