

Statement of Colin Goddard
Congressional Forum on the Gun Show Loophole Closing Act of 2009
July 14, 2010

I would first of all like to thank Chairman Scott, Congressman Castle, Congresswoman McCarthy, and Congressman Quigley for giving me this opportunity to speak before you today, and to thank all of you for your leadership on the critical issue of gun violence prevention. I sincerely say thank you. I'd also like to thank everyone else who is here today.

Now, the fact is Congressmen, I wouldn't be sitting in front of you today if it weren't for the events that took place at Virginia Tech on April 16th, 2007.

I wouldn't be sitting in front of you today if it weren't for the 10 minutes of hell that I survived that day.

And I wouldn't be sitting in front of you today if it weren't for all the things I have learned in my search for answering "Why" and "How" am I still alive.

What started off as a typical day in a small town school in southwest Virginia soon expanded our country's definition of the worst mass-shooting in US history. Midway through my 9:00am French class, we began to hear odd banging noises coming from somewhere outside of our classroom. When our teacher went to investigate the sounds, she immediately slammed the door shut and ordered us all to get underneath our desks and for someone to call 911. In complete disbelief of the rapidly unfolding situation, I took out my phone and, as I later found out, placed the only call to the police by someone in the building. I tried to explain the unexplainable situation to the dispatcher but was cut short when bullets began bursting through our door and we all dove to the floor.

The next 10 minute period was the longest 10 minute period of my entire life. It felt like hours. I took one glance at the front of the room where my teacher had stood and instead saw a man with two holsters over his shoulders begin to turn down my aisle of desks.

The force of the first bullet entering above my left knee threw the phone from my hand and it landed next to the head of a girl lying next to me named Emily Haas. She picked it up and actually remained on call with the police the entire time.

As he travelled back and forth between the classrooms, each time he came back into our room, I was shot again. The second and third time in both my hips, and the fourth time through my right shoulder. I don't ever remember thinking I was going to die, I just couldn't believe this was really happening to me. It was so surreal. There were times I felt like I was almost dreaming it.

This dream was finally interrupted by silence. As quickly as everything started, it all just stopped. By this point you could hear the police were very close to our room. As they entered, they shouted "Shooter down", and that's when I realized the silence was only

because he had committed suicide. I put one hand up on top of a desk to let them know I was alive. As they dragged me out into the hallway, I began to realize what had just happened, and began my long road to recovery. Today, I still carry 3 bullets with me and a newly implanted titanium rod in my body.

The fact is Congressmen, I wouldn't be sitting in front of you today if it wasn't for that 10 minute experience that changed my life.

I wouldn't be sitting in front of you today if it weren't for the phone call I made and the exceptional work of the law enforcement agencies that responded.

And finally, as simply as I can put it, I wouldn't be sitting in front of you today if our federal gun laws had been stronger.

If Seung-Hui Cho, who had a known mental health history that disqualified him from purchasing firearms, had had his record uploaded to the NICS background check system as required, I wouldn't be here in front of you today. The existing Federal law at the time was too weak to protect me and my classmates as it was intended to do.

So the fact is, I **shouldn't** be sitting in front of you today.

When we learned that fact, that Cho's mental health records should have disqualified him from purchasing firearms through the legal way he did, we worked with Congress to help ensure that states were getting more records uploaded into the National Instant Check System (NICS). This was a good first step, however it should be known that this improvement has yet to be applied in every state. This weakness then opened my eyes to the greater patchwork of state and Federal Laws in our country. And what I learned surprised me.

What I learned was that many of our state and federal gun laws are written in ways to make them ineffective and unenforceable. Even if Cho had been properly turned down during a background check from the gun dealer, he could have easily attended any of the dozens of gun shows that take place throughout Virginia each weekend and bought the same weapons from a "private seller" with no background check into his mental history and no questions asked. I know this first hand, and I tried to demonstrate it all to you with the video that you just saw. The existing Brady Act, as it is written, is too weak to protect future Americans from another Seung-Hui Cho or other prohibited purchasers.

Last summer, I traveled all over the country visiting gun shows in an attempt to expose the Gun Show Loophole. I passed right by all the licensed dealers responsibly conducting background checks and went right through the loophole over and over again. I went to shows in Texas, Ohio, Maine, Minnesota and right across the river in my home state of Virginia. I was amazed at how quick and easy it was getting my hands on just about any type of weapon I could imagine. I bought, or watched a friend buy, 9mm's, 22's, Tech-9's, and Mack-11's. I bought an AK-47 without showing any ID or going through any background check. I even bought the same type of gun that shot me. Each

transaction took only less than 5 minutes. And when I was done either I, or the purchaser I went with, would turn all weapons over to the police. The sickening thing about what I did and the footage you just saw was that everything was completely legal under our current law.

I can think of NO reasonable, responsible, logical reason why that should be. I can think of no reason why the Gun Show Loophole should exist. Why should sellers at one table be required to run background checks, when the sellers, literally two tables down – with the exact same weapons – are allowed to sell their guns to anyone who just has the cash in hand? The reasonable, responsible answer is: they shouldn't. It's no mystery why the guns sold by so-called "private sellers" are often more expensive than the exact same model sold by licensed gun dealers. Purchasers who know they can't pass a background check are willing to pay a premium. One seller told me straight up, and I quote, "No paperwork, no tax, that's gotta be worth something." For gun traffickers, domestic abusers and felons who can't pass a background check, that's worth plenty.

The fact is, since the Brady Act began requiring background checks only on licensed dealers, it has denied, and thus prevented, more than 2 million firearms from falling into the hands of dangerous prohibited purchasers. So it's only logical that this number would increase if the background check is further applied to private sellers dealing guns at gun shows because everyone knows that's an easy way to get around it.

My personal experiences provide ample evidence as to why our federal gun laws need to be strengthened. Getting more records into the NICS system is absolutely important. But without applying these records on a broader scale, that means, without, at least, applying the background check to private sellers at public gun shows, all the new records in the world aren't really any more useful. And I'm here to tell you, first-hand, that ineffective laws that put guns in the hands of the wrong people are a serious threat to the public safety of your citizens. My experiences since April 16, 2007 have lead me to conclude that it is far too easy for dangerous people to get their hands on dangerous weapons in this country. So today, the gun show loophole must be closed.

The fact is Congressmen, I wouldn't be sitting here in front of you today if I didn't believe, with every part of me, that this is the right thing to do.

I wouldn't be sitting here in front of you today if I didn't know that closing the Gun Show Loophole will save American lives.

And finally, I wouldn't be sitting here in front of you today if I didn't believe that my elected officials will do what is reasonable and right to protect their citizens.

Thank you for your time.