

# Episode 190-- After Decades, the First Federal Gun Safety Le...

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## SPEAKERS

Martina Leinz, Christian Heyne, JJ Janflone, Kelly Sampson, Sen. Chris Murphy

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JJ Janflone 00:09

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JJ Janflone 00:37

Hey everybody, welcome back to another episode of Red, Blue and Brady. This is JJ, one of your hosts.



Kelly Sampson 00:43

I'm Kelly, your other host.



JJ Janflone 00:44

And we're so glad that you were able to join us on what has been a very busy and historic week for I guess what Kelly, good reasons and bad reasons?



Kelly Sampson 00:54

Yeah, exactly. We have not only seen a bipartisan Senate bill pass for the first time in 30 years. But then we've also seen the Supreme Court come out with a decision that we will definitely dive into in future episodes.



JJ Janflone 01:08

Yes, next week, we are devoting ourselves to talking about what is being called the Bruen Supreme Court case. But this week, we really wanted to make sure that we held some space to do some celebrating and some unpacking of this historic bipartisan gun violence prevention bill. We're going to talk all about what it means, where we go from here and what it was like to be in the room where it all happened.



Kelly Sampson 01:31

I was just thinking about Hamilton. Yeah. And to do that we are joined by some longtime advocates in this space.



JJ Janflone 01:39

Yes, we are joined by Senator Chris Murphy, one of the big movers behind this bill, Christian Heynem Brady Vice President of Policy, and Martina Leinz, who in addition to being a Brady board member is a longtime president of Brady's Northern Virginia chapter. All of these folks have been engaged in this fight for a very long time. And all of them shared with us, you know, just what it's like to see movement after 30 years, but also where we need to go next.



JJ Janflone 02:10

Thank you all so so very much for joining us. If we can Senator Murphy, can we start with you? I feel like at this point, our audience definitely knows who you are. But could you please introduce yourself?



Sen. Chris Murphy 02:21

My name is Chris Murphy. And I am a US Senator from Connecticut.



JJ Janflone 02:25

How about you, Martina?



Martina Leinz 02:26

So my name is Martina Leinz. And I am a longtime advocate for gun violence prevention. I have been affiliated with the different iterations of Brady for 22 years. Now I serve as the President of the Virginia chapters of Brady and I'm on the board.





JJ Janflone 02:45

And last but certainly not least, Christian.



Christian Heyne 02:47

My name is Christian Heyne. And I'm the Vice President of Policy at Brady and really happy to be back with you, JJ.



JJ Janflone 02:53

Thank you. You went from not being on the pod hardly ever to just we've got a glut of Christian.



Christian Heyne 02:57

Look, I will take it as I can get it. And I always love being on here to talk with you. And especially when we have happy news to discuss.



JJ Janflone 03:08

Well, and the question on everyone's mind, you know, why are we here today? Poor Kelly is even calling in from a wedding. So you know what, what brought us here today? Because Christian, you know, last time I checked, you and I last week, we're talking about a bill that, you know, we didn't even know what the text was going to be. And now the House is voting on it. So what's going on today?



Christian Heyne 03:30

I mean, we went from a whole lot of hypothetical to holy smokes this is real. I yeah, what I can say is last night, I sat in a room with survivors and activists for about eight hours in a Senate room, as we waited patiently for an opportunity to eventually get ushered into the gallery of the US Senate, where we witnessed this bill get voted and approved in the US Senate with 65 senators in an incredible show of bipartisan work to really address gun violence. And it was one of the most I think, emotional nights in my professional career. It is wild that we were talking JJ just last week and didn't know what the language would look like, let alone now we've moved on into a space where it can become law.



JJ Janflone 04:29

What was it like to be there as this vote all came together? Right, as survivors, as activists, as advocates, I'd love to know what it was like sort of emotionally to just physically be there. And I'd love maybe Senator Murphy, could we start with you since this bill is in many ways, your baby?

S

**Sen. Chris Murphy 04:48**

Well, I'm pretty humble about my place in this movement. I've been an activist and a leader for 10 years, but there have been folks who have been fighting for 30 years or more and of course I'm an interloper to other people's grief there folks who come to this movement because they've lost a loved one or a child. And I'll never ever understand that pain. So, last night was emotional for me. It's been a long time since Congress has stepped up and done something meaningful on gun violence, we saved a lot of lives in this country with what we did. And we worked really hard over the last month to get it done. But, you know, what maybe meant more to me is, you know, what it meant to the victims, what it meant to the survivors, what it meant to the moms and dads from Sandy Hook, I was glad to have many of them in the gallery of the Senate last night watching the final vote, many others were watching on, on television, I've talked to a lot of them over the course of the day. And, you know, to me, I, I am just so glad that we were able to take a step forward, that will really reduce the likelihood that other moms and dads will have to go through what a lot of mothers and fathers had to experience and endure across this country over the last three decades.

M

**Martina Leinz 05:59**

You know, it's been a marathon, not a sprint, we've worked really diligently. And, you know, there really aren't words to describe how incredible it felt to not only finally see some progress, but to have bipartisan support for that progress. There were 15 Republicans, that finally bucked the NRA and said, you know, what public safety comes before corporate gun industry profits. And so that, you know, was a great feeling. Um, it also, you know, provided a little bit of salve to all of the survivors out there who have been fighting so hard for this. And so it was, it was great. It was a great feeling, of course, sadly, the positive feelings we had were a little bit tempered by the very reckless and dangerous Supreme Court decision that we saw yesterday.

C

**Christian Heyne 06:54**

Yeah, I tried to put this into words afterwards on social media and like, you know, to your point I have been I mean, in a lot of ways I've grown up in the gun violence prevention movement. I was 19 when my parents were shot, and I've been doing this work in Washington, DC for the last 12 years. I've been in those halls to protest. I have lobbied, I have fought with staff. I have had very cordial conversations. I've sat next to incredible giants and had long, heartfelt conversations with with heroes of mine, like John Lewis. I've also had to sit in committee rooms and hear a lot of hot air come out of and frankly, misinformation come out of senators like Ted Cruz. I have been arrested in the rotunda following the sit-ins where where I rushed over with my brother at two in the morning, to hear Chris Murphy hold the Senate floor to talk about how ridiculous it is that folks wouldn't come together to come do things. Last night was the first time that I was able to sit in the gallery and be filled with hope, with a broad bipartisan vote in support. It is obviously not a perfect bill. It is obviously not everything that we need. But for me, in my professional career, and in my my personal life as an advocate for gun violence prevention. It was one of the most inspiring and hope filled nights I've ever had.

**JJ Janflone 08:28**

Well I wonder Senator Murphy too, if you could start for us, you know, how did this even

well, I wonder, Senator Murphy too, if you could start for us, you know, how did this even happen? Can you, is it possible even to give a Schoolhouse Rock version of how this bill happened?

S

Sen. Chris Murphy 08:37

Yeah, well, you know, the old Schoolhouse Rock documentary doesn't apply anymore to the United States Congress. I wish it did. But these days in order to get anything done in the Senate, you tend to need to put together an ad hoc group of Republicans and Democrats that operate outside of the committee process. And that's what we did. Two days after Uvalde, Senator Cornyn of Texas, Senator Tillis in North Carolina, two Republicans. Me and Senator Sinema, a conservative Democrat from Arizona, sat down in a small basement room in the Capitol and decided that we were going to work together, decided that we were going to try to pass a law that broke this 30 year logjam, we teased out some ideas that day and over the next 30 days, put them down onto paper. We surprised a lot of people when we announced our agreement because it had, I think, more aggressive changes in our gun laws than a lot of pundits thought Republicans could agree to. But we worked that together. We then sort of broadened our group out to include about four more Democrats, four more Republicans. We eventually, you know, got the White House involved so they knew what we were doing. We let Senator McConnell and Senator Schumer know what we were doing. And eventually we were able to bring that bill to the floor this week for a very quick debate and a vote but in Washington these days, that tends to be how things get done these sort of acts ad hoc, almost improvisational groups of senators, sometimes four, sometimes groups as big as 10. They try to put together a proposal and bring it to the floor, we succeeded, which was really gratifying.

K

Kelly Sampson 10:12

And just to put a finer point on the whole notion of moving forward, what impact will this bill have on gun violence?

S

Sen. Chris Murphy 10:19

I think this bill is going to be a lifesaver. Obviously, it doesn't do everything that we want, but no movement gets everything they want in their first piece of legislation. I really think this is a day to celebrate what we did. And just think about the change in our domestic abuse laws. Now, if you beat up your partner, if you get convicted for assault, whether it's a felony or misdemeanor, whether it's your spouse, or your girlfriend, your guns are being taken away, you're not gonna be able to go to a gun store and buy a gun. We know, states that have that policy have 10% fewer domestic homicides. So just that change alone is going to save the lives of over time 1000s of women. In Connecticut, our red flag worked just a week ago to take guns away from a young man who's threatening to shoot up schools. Now, states are gonna have more money, more resources to better implement those laws, that's gonna save lives. And then in this bill is this historic commitment of mental health works massively expanding Mental Health Access in this country. And you forget that changes in gun laws. But the more controversial parts of the bill, the increase in mental health funding that Republicans and Democrats push for here, that's gonna save a lot of lives as well. I mean, this is one of those few chances in the Senate where you get to do something that's all good, no bad all upside, no downside. And it's really miraculous that we're able to do it after 30 years of being stuck.



JJ Janflone 11:41

Thank you, though, for breaking that down. I wonder if the three of you, you know, kind of coming from different perspectives as well, right. Were you at all surprised by the bipartisan support that this bill got first of its inception, and then now it is passing?



Martina Leinz 11:55

Prior to the horrific events in Buffalo and Uvalde I would have said yes. But after the racist attack in Buffalo, and the attack on babies in Uvalde, it was so clear that they had to do something, and they could no longer justify standing with a gun lobby, and opposing all legislation. Honestly, if anything, I'm surprised that there wasn't more Republican support. I feel like the power of the NRA has been so diminished, and they shouldn't be in fear of them anymore. And the majority of Americans, even gun owners are with us in wanting sensible change. So no, I wasn't surprised.



Sen. Chris Murphy 12:43

I don't know that I was surprised because I've had this theory that we have been building power as a movement over the last 10 years, especially Brady's obviously been carrying the torch for a long time. But over the last 10 years, we've been building and building and building and the NRA, not coincidentally, has been getting weaker and weaker and weaker. And so my theory was that there was going to be a tipping point, there was gonna be this moment where we just had more power than they did. And that's exactly what happened. I mean, it's so interesting to see Republican senators who voted for this package coming out of the Senate after that first vote and saying to the press, well, you know, I just think the NRA is wrong on this one, I'll, you know, vote with the NRA in the future. But this time they were wrong, this package is good for, this bill is good for my state. And that was not something that Republican senators said, you know, five years ago, 10 years ago, certainly not 15 years ago. So things have changed to the point where Republicans feel like there's political gain to be had in voting for gun safety laws. And that is only because of what we've been able to build and the moral imperative that they feel to do something from the American public.



Martina Leinz 13:46

You know, 22 years of this, I can tell you, it is so gratifying to see how far the pendulum has swung. Remember that Virginia is the home state of the NRA. And yet we have managed to flip the state to you know, majorities that believe in sensible gun violence prevention. And, you know, when I first started doing this work, we did not have even all of the Democratic legislators on the same page as us. But now they all are, now they all clamor, they all want to be the one to introduce the background check bill or the assault weapons ban, and it's just really encouraging and, you know, in, in 2020, and 2021, we were able to pass some really meaningful and substantive reforms to our weak gun laws. And Virginia is now you know, has some of the best laws among the states. And you know, we're really proud of that, really proud of it.

K

**Kelly Sampson 14:42**

One thing I wanted to give you an opportunity to address is, what do you say to advocates who say, you know, this bill isn't enough. We need more. Could you tell us a little bit about what the next steps should be?

S

**Sen. Chris Murphy 14:53**

Well, that's true, it isn't enough and we do need more. But you know what I know about every great social change movement in this country's history is that none of them got everything the first time, right. There was a small civil rights bill in the 1950s, that led to the 1963 bill and the 1964 bill. First, the marriage equality movement just got laws changed to allow gay couples to adopt. And then that ultimately turned into full marriage equality, every movement makes progress in steps. But you have to have that first victory. And what I know is that victories tend to beget victories. And I hope this movement sees the power of what it means to be active and involve to speak truth to power, you now have this window of what's possible, and we're not done, we're gonna still march forward and try to expand out the background checks system and take these dangerous weapons off the streets. But I also just think this is probably an okay moment to celebrate what we did. I get the politics these days, everybody just wants to know what's next. But you know what, let's just take a day, let's just take a day to celebrate what this movement accomplished, let's just take a day to celebrate the fact that there are going to be a lot more Americans alive over the next 10 years because of the bill that we just passed. And that's really where my focus is right now.

C

**Christian Heyne 16:11**

I will just say, this work can be unrelenting, it can be very lonely. It can feel hopeless. Moments like the moment we had last night are few and far between. And I hope that folks understand how meaningful it is to us look, it is very easy to be cynical. And to look at these, to try to rationalize it with well, that party gets this for that. And there's, you know, political rationale for this. And, oh, we should wait till we get the perfect package. I've been doing this too long. And I got into it for one reason, which is to save lives. To do everything we can to prevent families from knowing the pain and trauma of gun violence, this bill is going to do that. There will be people who will never know it, that will be alive, or their loved ones will be alive or, and gun violence will have been prevented, because this policy was put into place. And that is an amazing thing. So I hope folks have a moment to feel that hope, to be filled with that hope, and to remember that the only reason it was possible at all. And I heard this over and over again, from the staffs, from Chuck Schumer, from all of these leaders that actually cast their votes to make this happen. And we're in the room to negotiate the policy. The only reason it's possible is because we kept showing up. So please keep showing up everybody.

M

**Martina Leinz 17:53**

Listen, this, this is something to celebrate. It has been almost 30 years since we've seen any legislation at all federally on this important issue. So this is to be celebrated. Look, it's progress. It's not success. But progress is progress. And we should really embrace it and recognize that

this package is really going to save lives. It's going to empower families and law enforcement to remove guns from people who are a danger to themselves or others, by incentivizing states to enact red flag laws. It's closing the loophole that did not provide a method for for dating or intimate partners to to seek the separation of firearms from those who've been convicted of domestic violence. That was an important loophole to close. That will save lives. The funding that will be directed to mental health, some of it has been earmarked for community violence interruption programs, and that will save lives. So you know, you have to embrace the positive in this, we're not done. Again, this is progress, not success. You know, we have to come back and keep fighting for the legislation that we know it's ultimately going to take to really put a dent in gun violence. But I was so pleased yesterday to hear from senators that they all are united in look, this is this is incredible. This is wonderful. And this is something that should be you know, a celebration to share with all activists who've helped get us to this point, but they're not done. They want to see background checks too, they want an assault weapons and high capacity magazine ban as well. They're not going to stop fighting. Neither will we.



JJ Janflone 19:44

Well, and I wonder what it was like to for this bill to be passed at the same time that we saw the Bruen decision which is the the SCOTUS decision on open carry. Yeah, rollercoaster of emotions, I'm sure in one day, right.



Christian Heyne 19:58

Look, yesterday was a roller coaster. Sure, I think for many of us, it was glad I was glad to have a bright spot at the end of the day. I think in a lot of ways, there is a massive disconnect that was on full display yesterday about directionally where the American people are, directionally where our elected officials are headed. And definitely primarily where one of our branches of government is walking backwards, we are going to have to remain vigilant. In no way should yesterday's vote make folks think that we can let up. For me, it reinforces why when we show up, we can win, right? When we fight, we can win. That is a reality, that really should make people feel more motivated to keep showing up and making phone calls and writing letters and doing all these things, right? This is a Supreme Court that that just delivered, one of the most extreme decisions we have ever seen. Let alone the most extreme decision we have ever seen on guns, overturning all of the precedent that we've ever had. It is horrible. And and, you know, they are essentially telling states that they have no self determination in how they can protect their citizens from gun violence. So to me, watching those votes come in. With the backdrop of that case, it just tells us that we've got more work to do here. But there is a future in which we can get it done.



Martina Leinz 21:35

To have lasted this long in the movement, obviously, I'm tenacious. And I think those of us who've been in the trenches for this long are, and we understand that there are going to be highs and lows. And unfortunately, we've had a lot more lows than highs. So you know, we know how to how to deal with it. And I think by nature, most of us are glass half full type of people, we're optimists, we believe that this is right, and that this change will eventually come. And so we persevere. We just persevere.



JJ Janflone 22:12

No, and just listeners, just so you know, we're not going to go into the Bruen decision today. We will next week. So next week's podcast, hold tight, we're gonna we're gonna do a real big deep dive. But in the meantime, just hold on, we wanted to hold this space for celebratory and explanation purposes.



Christian Heyne 22:29

Just enjoy this legislative victory before you listen to that panel discussion, and maybe afterwards too.



Kelly Sampson 22:36

So what does this mean for the future of efforts to prevent gun violence?



Sen. Chris Murphy 22:41

Oh, I'm just not. Yeah, I just I'm just not there. Right. I mean, we just passed the, we're speaking as we passed the bill an hour ago through the House. So I guess what comes next is the President signs it. And then after that, we implement it. So we got to make sure that every state that wants the red flag money gets it, we got to make sure that we effectively take guns away from domestic abusers, we got to implement this new system of enhanced background checks and a waiting period on under 21 buyers, and we got to get \$15 billion of mental health money out the door, so that we can effectively save lives through better mental health care. So frankly, obviously, it's an I'm gonna be a member of this movement and a leader in forever, I'm sure I will come to some conclusion about what is next legislatively, but it's just totally not a moment for me personally, to think about that. I want to make sure we get this bill signed into law, implemented and get it saving lives.



Martina Leinz 23:36

And next steps are really for people to organize at the state level, and to help their legislators make the best use of the dollars that have now been earmarked for red flag laws, and to continue working at the state level to pass sensible legislation. And, you know, we can't take our eyes off of Congress, we have to continue fighting and supporting efforts there. But for in the short term, it will be at the state level that we need to activate.



JJ Janflone 24:08

Well, and then shameless plug, how, how can folks get involved at the local level with Brady, if they want to get activated? You know, now having seen that, you know, change can happen, it does happen?

M

Martina Leinz 24:21

Well, I would encourage them to reach out to the Brady chapters in their states and to indicate that they'd like to be involved. And, you know, we welcome everyone we're not, you know, we're not just moms that have been in this movement for a long time. We're, you know, a lot of retirees who now have time to give, young people who are recognizing that it's on their shoulders to shape the type of country they want to live in. You want to get involved. We welcome everyone. And, you know, whether you want to work on legislation, reach out to federal or state lawmakers, help educate about safe storage practices, demonstrate in Virginia, we demonstrate in front of the NRA headquarters on the 14th of each month. There are many, many ways to get involved in to make a difference. Yesterday, Senator Booker did such a good job of reminding us all, to think back in history and when real change was made. And if you take women's suffrage, for example, it wasn't a group of male senators that just decided, hey, we should give women the right to vote, not by a longshot. It took all of those women activists to get out there and the men that joined them to demand the right to vote. And that's where we are with this movement, we need every single person out there helping us demanding the change that we need. So our children can live in a safe society.

C

Christian Heyne 25:57

Like I said, I mean, in a lot of ways, we got to keep showing up, we need the states to continue to push right now, because of this case, after the discussion you have. And folks understand that case more, right, the Bruen Supreme Court ruling, we have to jump straight into action in a number of states that are going to be implicated by that. And then, you know, in Congress, our job is to make sure that folks know that this policy is not going to end gun violence. And that this is an incredible first step. But we have got to, it is a sign that we've got to double down these efforts so that we can really get them all the policies that will eventually be able to prevent gun violence in a really meaningful way to the point that you and I, JJ no longer have jobs. And that is the goal. Right?



JJ Janflone 26:41


Well, and I just want to take a second and to say thank you for all of you on this call. And all the folks at home who've worked so so hard to make this gun violence prevention bill possible, and who have continued and will continue I know, to fight for gun violence prevention, because we would not have this without you.

S


Sen. Chris Murphy 26:59

Yeah, and that's my main message today. I know how hard it is to keep pushing that rock up the hill when, you know, it keeps on falling back down. And we've had lots of successes over the last 10 years. Don't get me wrong. States have changed their laws, we've passed referendums, private sector companies have changed their policy. So we've had victories. But obviously we were missing that big victory in Congress. And my, my belief is that this had nothing to do with my powers of persuasion. This was ultimately a decision that Republican

senators made based upon the shift in power that has happened over the course of the last decade away from the gun lobby, and toward anti gun violence movement. And that's, you know, that's a powerful thing.

 Christian Heyne 27:47

Well, I appreciate that. And the only reason I will take that compliment is because I know that there's so many incredible survivors that inspire me every day, and so many of them were there last night. And, and I agree, none of us do this, because it is something we want to be doing. I think none of us wish that we knew each other that we know each other as well as we do. And I just am always in awe of survivors. But I gotta tell you too, JJ, I am always incredibly inspired by so many people who come to this work who haven't been impacted by gun violence. Because it took my mom's death to really wake me up and to spark my activism. And that's true for a lot of people. I am blown away with people who dedicate their lives to this issue, who haven't had to feel that firsthand. And it's just because you got big ol hearts, and you want to change the world. And so I put the spotlight back on you too, so.

 Martina Leinz 28:43

And thank you to all the advocates out there, and all the people who study this issue and take the time to really be sure about who they're voting for. Makes a difference. Thank you.

 JJ Janflone 28:55


Oh, Martina. Yeah, that's huge.

 Kelly Sampson 29:00

Well, JJ, it's pretty surreal to be able to hear what everyone had to say about this bill, especially in a week like the one that we're having.

 JJ Janflone 29:10

Absolutely. I think what I keep coming back to is sort of I guess what everybody said, right, which is that this is just the beginning. But this is a huge, huge moment. You know, we've been drowning for so long, right? And finally, the rope got dropped in to us. But that doesn't mean we're back on the boat yet. Right? We still have to keep fighting.

 Kelly Sampson 29:27

Yeah, and especially, I mean, gun violence we talked about it so often, the diversity of episodes that we've done, speaks to the fact that gun violence is a multi faceted issue. And so we knew, and we always have known that there's not going to be just one bill. So we're not going to stop,

we can't stop. And you know, to everyone who is talking about some of the links of gun violence to things like criminal justice reform, or gender based violence. We see you and we're definitely going to keep going.



**JJ Janflone 29:58**

And we take the time today to thank you yet again for all that you've done and continue to do.



**JJ Janflone 30:05**

Hey, want to share with the podcast? Listeners can now get in touch with us here at Red, Blue and Brady via phone or text message. Simply call or text us at 480-744-3452 with your thoughts, questions, concerns, ideas, whatever. Kelly and I are standing by.



**Kelly Sampson 30:20**

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 at [Bradyunited.org](http://Bradyunited.org) or on social at Bradybuzz. Be brave and remember, take action not sides.