

Episode 55-- Guns Can't Fight Covid-19

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SPEAKERS

David Chipmann, Christian Heyne, JJ Janflone



JJ Janflone 00:08

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JJ Janflone 00:41

Welcome back everybody to another very special minisode of Red, Blue, and Brady. Today, I am back again, not in the studio, in the virtual studio I guess, with dear friend of the podcast, Christian Heyne and David Chippman, who podcast listeners should remember from a fantastic podcast that we did on the Tiarht Amendment and data and so much else. So go check that one out. But today, we're here to talk a little bit about first-time gun owners, people have gone out and participated in this surge of gun purchases in this time of COVID-19. What does this mean? How can people be safe? And so to answer these questions, maybe let's just kick it right off, and gentlemen, can you introduce yourselves?



David Chipmann 01:21

Well, thanks for welcoming me back and it's nice to connect again with your audience,

although the world has changed since we first talked. My name is David Chipmann. I'm a senior policy advisor at Giffords, where I've now served for about four years for Gabby Giffords. And formerly, I was an ATF special agent for 25 years. So what we talked about today will be through the lens of my experience, not only an advocacy but as a law enforcement professional.



Christian Heyne 01:47

And I am Chrisitan Heyne, the vice president of policy here at Brady, feeling really good JJ that you've decided to invite me back twice, so close back to back. My confidence level is high. And really, really excited to be here with you again, David, thank you so much for joining us.



JJ Janflone 02:07

Although I do have to say Christian has admitted, and I do have it in text so I can keep it forever, that he views Kelly and I as the best duo.



Christian Heyne 02:17

Listen, that was said in confidence. And I thought we were in the tree and the nest of trust, and now it's out there in the world.



JJ Janflone 02:27

I'm so sorry. I violated the circle of trust. So maybe just to start, David, can you tell us a little bit about what Giffords is doing? I'm sure, just like Brady, that you all are super busy.



David Chipmann 02:39

Sure. So first and foremost, it's just 'How do we function as an organization in this environment remotely? How do we build a bridge, a narrative bridge, between those things that we were advocating for previously to our current circumstances? And how are we reacting to new circumstances, like this spike in gun sales and other issues?' What I can say is we're healthy as an organization, which is good, we're getting into that rhythm. You know, Gabby's still playing a big part, even though she's not on the road. Yesterday, she read something that I was quoted in in the news, and I got a quick email back from her and a bunch of heart and dinosaur emojis, which is the biggest compliment you can ever get from Gabby.



Christian Heyne 03:29

Awesome.



JJ Janflone 03:30

I love that that's the sign of affection.



Christian Heyne 03:32

First off, I think, David, the episode that you joined us on before was just so enlightening. We had a good talk afterwards. But anytime we can sort of get on a recording and nerd out over trace data, you know it's been a really good day. So thinking and leaning into your expertise and your experience, not only as a special agent in the ATF and your experience in law enforcement, but also your experiences as as a gun owner - you have alluded to it already, but as people in the United States are preparing for the uncertainty of COVID-19, we do know from reports and from NICS numbers that are pouring in that, that we've seen an increase in gun sales, and some would say a dramatic increase, also a lot of first time gun buyers. And in particular, your blog that that folks can find on on Giffords.org, where you talk about panic buying guns, not keeping people safe, necessarily, or safer during the COVID-19 pandemic, I think was really articulately laid out. And I would just love if you could take a moment to talk about that, and what you talked about in that in that piece.



David Chipmann 04:54

Sure. So let me talk by just offering my response as a citizen going through what everyone else is going through as a gun owner. And then maybe I'll work out a bit on the day I immersed myself in yesterday coming from NICS about the spike in gun sales. I am a gun owner. I store my gun securely, unloaded in my house. That's the choice that I make. I'm not one of those people who keep a loaded gun under my pillow. And I'll have to admit that as things began to unfold, and the pressure on my 401k, the pressure that I saw in sort of the panic reaction of my neighbors, I did check where my ammo was. I think that that kind of fearful response is pretty normal. What I did not do is rush to the store and buy another gun. I did not choose to buy more ammo. I'll admit a little, and I'm embarrassed about this not now, I bought way too much beef jerky, and I'm going to be eating tuna for the next two years. So we all have our own personal ways of reacting to stress. Hopefully the way I reacted, although I probably will look back on it being foolish, I don't think I made any decisions that put my family in jeopardy. And I think what's concerning about what we have seen in the spike in gun sales is that for some percentage of gun buyers, up

until March of this year, they decide, they made a decision in a time of non-crisis, that purchasing a gun was not something that they wanted to do. They did not think it made sense on a whole host of levels. But because of this circumstance, while under crisis, while under stress, while under the cloud that they might lose their job and need money more than ever, they've chosen to spend hundreds of dollars to bring a lethal weapon in their home, likely in an environment where they will receive no training for that weapon and probably haven't thought out how it would be used. And this is within an environment, at least in my neighborhood there have been zero zombie attacks yet, there have been no reports of public unrest, there has been a lot of panic-buying of goods, but it is really what concerns me the most is not the existing gun owner who wants to stock up on ammo. It's that person who's making a new decision - one that requires a lot of discernment and judgment in a time of crisis. I know anyone who is a partner with Brady, and follows your communications, knows what research and data tells us about the impact of a gun in the home, and how it be intuitive that during uncertainty you want a gun because it's gonna make you safer. Everything we know is that a gun in the home makes us less safe and makes our families less safe. We talk about exponential impacts of this virus - if that gun is in the hands of someone untrained, I think it's exponentially more dangerous.

C

Christian Heyne 08:08

Yeah, it's a really, really quick, great way of framing that. And we couldn't agree more right? As an organization, even, from the executive level, to our volunteers, to our followers and listeners of this podcast, gun ownership is a part of the Brady name, right? We have a number of programs specifically oriented at responsible gun ownership, and and completely understand, I don't own a gun, I have gone shooting quite a bit over the years, my family didn't grow up in a household that that grew up with gun. At the same time, I completely understand wanting to have agency in being able to control your own safety. But at the same time, the way you framed it was so spot on, right, it's a choice, and it's a choice about safety and personal safety for yourself and for your family. I think for us and for myself, personally, one of the most important things and responsibilities we have as an organization right now is making it very clear that that choice comes with information and statistics and public health responsibilities that are associated with it. If you had a gun in your home, you were more likely to be shot. And there are certain precautions that you need to take in order to make sure that you are protecting your family, that you're protecting kids that are in your home, that you're making sure guns aren't easily accessible or stolen and able to find their way onto a criminal market. All of these things and responsibilities that are our roles that come along with gun ownership. And I just loved the way that you sort of laid that out there, because I think as people are engaged and thinking about gun ownership in a new way, I do think that it's important for organizations like ours, like Giffords, like Brady, to make sure that we're saying, 'That is

totally understandable. You have a right to go buy a gun to protect yourself and your family, but here is a lot of information so that you know exactly what that choice entails.'



JJ Janflone 10:23

I have this big fear about first-time gun owners, who are very worried, going out buying guns now, not engaging in courses, not engaging in classes about proper safe storage, but also just like proper firing, proper ways to clean a weapon, proper ways to load a weapon. And so they might be reliant right now on just Internet sources and things like that for how to take care of these weapons. And what that can mean during the pandemic and what that can mean, even after the pandemic. Unlike your hoard of toilet paper, the gun will exist in five to six years, and it'll still be possibly in your closet, possibly loaded. And what does that mean for a family? So I was wondering, David, especially between your work at Giffords and your work as an ATF agent, what even you would recommend, if people do decide to go out and buy a firearm in this time, how can they do so in a way that is responsible and safe?



David Chipmann 11:22

Yeah, I think one of the most deadly narratives that the NRA and many people in the pro-gun rights movement has shared is this narrative that if you can lawfully purchase a gun, you are immediately part of this culture, a good guy culture and you're ready for game day. And I can just tell you, that I could just describe one hypothetical situation. I don't know if this has ever happened to someone. We live in a condo - I've also had this happen in a hotel room - where in the middle of the night, you're woken by a fire alarm, and you wake not knowing what's going on, somewhat panicked, incoherent stumbling around, yet, that's the condition one would be in the middle of the night with a gun under their pillow, with potentially someone knocking at their door or this hypothetical zombie attack or home invasion. And if you have not trained to wake up in the middle of the night and be able to make not only mature decisions but actually operate a firearm, you will not perform well. Part of my ATF training when I was on the SWAT team is they would wake you up in the middle of the night and drag you to the range. They would make you sprint around so that your heart rate would be up, so that you could simulate being in a deadly encounter. None of that training is required to own a gun. And very few people even endeavor to do that kind of training. So what we have is a population of gun owners, who are extremely confident but actually lack the competence to do what they want to do. And so I'm more scared, at least in the environment I live in, that I'm going to have a bullet flying into my home by a neighbor who just bought a gun and didn't know how to unload it. And so I think at this time, where it seems that some people are acting selfishly, we have to encourage people to do what's best for everyone. And I would suggest that it is

highly unlikely that the first-time gun owner today is going to be in a situation where the gun would add to their safety. And I can think of a laundry list of situations that would make them less safe. Now, to your ultimate question, if you've already made this decision, you must lock up your gun. And if for some reason you believe that that gun has to be ready to go, it needs to be in a safe and loaded in that situation. And if you really want to train, you know, figure, let yourself know how quickly you can open that safe, so that you're confident that you can still protect yourself with it in the safe. But that's assuming in a lot that you would somehow know what to do with that gun and when, once you took it from that secure location. We're hearing about increases in domestic violence. And for us who live in these urban environments where our neighbors are right next door or right upon us, you will see people knocking at your door in the middle of the night because they're trying to escape a domestic violence situation. If that is an unintended or an unusual occurrence for you, you might think that person is doing harm to your family, when actually they're just trying to seek refuge and support. See a real opportunity for a lot of mistakes, and with a gun, you can't undo these mistakes. They're permanent. With other decisions we make in life, like buying too much beef jerky, I wasted some money and now I'm going to have to suffer through eating this bag of crap. But, in other decisions, they alter everyone's outcomes, and that's what I'm concerned about. So if someone is buying a gun because they think they're likely to have to fire their gun within the next month, I'd say like, 'How is that possible? I was on the front lines and didn't fire mine?' Like someone's coming from a way different place, and it's a scary place.



JJ Janflone 15:58

And I think that that scary place is something to focus on, too, because as you've pointed out a few times, people purchasing or people making runs on weapons, people who already own firearms, getting more people doing runs on ammunition, this is, in part, people just sort of stocking up on a thing that makes them feel better. But then for new folks coming into this, this is a thing that's presented as a way to keep themselves safe, a way to keep the people that they love safe but firearms in the home, that's the danger. So you're introducing something that could actually cause you harm.



David Chipmann 16:33

Yeah, what I would encourage people, those who have already made this decision, those who might make this decision no matter what messaging they hear, is, it is clearly, even in the worst case scenario, that one would have some warning of some duration, where they would think like, 'Oh, OK, things are starting to get bad, I need to have access to my firearm.' And because of that, they should store that firearm unloaded, separate from the

ammunition, and both should be under combination or lock, so that it is impossible for anyone but themselves to access it. And for them, understanding it would take a couple of minutes for even them to access it. And to me, that's the way that you can mitigate a lot of the harm. If you're really in this Doomsday prepper mode, we are in a clearly challenging time for our country and for the whole world, but we are not dealing with bands of Mad Max-like gangs stealing groceries and zombies roaming. It's just not happening.



JJ Janflone 17:56

Excuse me, David, I've got my eurosia costume all ready to go. I am coming for your beef jerky. So speak for yourself.



Christian Heyne 18:05

And your tuna. And also, for what it's worth, I've seen the NRA's Twitter feed, and things are real dire out there.



David Chipmann 18:12

Yeah, so I posted, today on my Facebook - it's like, 'Hey, in exchange for a couple rolls of toilet paper, I'm more than happy to do my public service by using my former skills to protect our block from zombies. Like, I think that's a fair transaction.' And I make light of it. Like, I'm nervous about the situation too like, I'm checking my 401k, like I know how much money I have in savings. I'm worried about friends and family. Like, I get all of that uncertainty. I don't understand how the addition of a gun solves any of those things. So if you are the type of person who says like, 'I just have to have a gun because I might need it.' OKstore it like you might need it, not now, not tomorrow, but next week. And if you do that, you're really gonna make everyone a lot safer, first and foremost, your family. What we see from the NICSdata that I was plowing through yesterday, it looks like gun sales went up in March as compared to last March by a million. t's an extraordinary number. And when I'm looking at gun sites, those sites that produce many of the parts that people use to build in their home their own guns, which we often call ghost guns, those shelves are clear. I've gone on to internet websites like arms list, prices are up and inventories are down. And that's a common vehicle for private parties to do transactions. And so e there are a lot of things that are probably worse going on beyond those transactions at a gun store, where at least we have a record of that sale and we know the person buying it, even under panic, can legally own the firearm, which we don't know with private sales.



JJ Janflone 20:12

So if we are, if our listeners are sort of concerned about themselves or concerned about others or concerned about a gun that they've just brought into their home or are still on the fence about whether or not they want to go out and get one in these times, do you have any fond words of wisdom for them?



David Chipmann 20:27

Yeah. So usually people who are using firearms irresponsibly do it very publicly. I think that we can be good citizens by calling people out. Like, I think that we all have an opportunity to push back on the narrative that being a gun owner means something that it is not, like some mythical superhero. For many gun owners, it's a much more weighty responsibility that we feel. And I think for those of us who are actual gun owners, it is our responsibility to call out other gun owners, and it's easier for us to do than leaving it up to the 70 percent of Americans who've chosen not to bring a gun into their home.



JJ Janflone 21:17

Well, on that note, I will say thank you so much to both of you for coming on.



Christian Heyne 21:21

Thank you.



JJ Janflone 21:23

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