

Obama reignites push for gun legislation

Written by George E. Curry, NNPA Editor-in-Chief
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WASHINGTON (NNPA) – In the wake of high-profile gun violence in the nation’s capital and Chicago, President Barack Obama told members of the Congressional Black Caucus and their dinner guests that he will renew his effort to persuade Congress to pass legislation toughening the nation’s gun laws.

Speaking at the CBC Foundation Dinner recently, Obama said, “We can’t rest until all of our children can go to school or walk down the street free from the fear that they will be struck down by a stray bullet. Just two days ago, in my hometown of Chicago, 13 people were shot during a pickup basketball game, including a 3-year-old girl. Tomorrow night I’ll be meeting and mourning with families in this city who now know the same unspeakable grief of families in Newtown, and Aurora, and Tucson, and Chicago, and New Orleans, and all across the country – people whose loved ones were torn from them without headlines sometimes, or public outcry. But it’s happening every single day.”

President Obama, in his role as comforter-in-chief, addressed 4,000 people mourners Sunday night at the Marine Corps Barracks, several blocks from the Navy Yard where Aaron Alexis, 34, a former Navy reservist with a history of mental problems, killed 12 people on Sept. 16 in Building 197 before being killed himself.

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“Part of what wears on . . . is the sense that this has happened before,” President Obama said. “What wears on us, what troubles us so deeply, as we gather here today is this senseless violence that took place in the Navy Yard echoes other recent tragedies.”

Exasperated by inaction in Congress, the president said, “By now . . . it should be clear that the change we need will not come from Washington, even when tragedy strikes Washington. Change will come the only way it ever has come, and that’s from the American people.”

Obama acknowledges that he faces an uphill battle getting gun legislation enacted.

Despite strong support from President Obama, Vice President Joe Biden and relatives of the 20 first-graders and six educators killed in Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. last December, legislation requiring expanded background checks failed to clear the Senate earlier this year.

“We fought a good fight earlier this year, but we came up short,” Obama said at the CBC dinner. “And that means we’ve got to get back up and go back at it. Because as long as there are those who fight to make it as easy as possible for dangerous people to get their hands on a gun, then we’ve got to work as hard as possible for the sake of our children. We’ve got to be ones who are willing to do more work to make it harder.”

Unlike when Obama addressed the CBC two years ago, there was no controversy over his speech this year.

President Obama created a stir in 2011 when he said, “I expect all of you to march with me and press on. Take off your bedroom slippers, put on your marching shoes. Shake it off. Stop complaining, stop grumbling, stop crying.”

Both Obama and most Democrats in Congress are united in their push for gun legislation.

Public opinion polls show that support for stricter gun laws has fallen since the immediate aftermath of Sandy Hook. A Gallop poll conducted December 19-22 found 58 percent of the public favored tougher gun laws, 6 percent wanted less strict laws, 34 percent wanted no changes and 2 percent were undecided.

However, a Gallup poll conducted last week showed 49 percent favoring tougher gun laws, 13 percent less strict, 37 percent no changes and 2 percent undecided.

A June CBS News/New York Times poll showed a partisan divide, with 78 percent of Democrats, 30 percent of Republicans and 46 percent of independents favoring stricter laws. Only 2 percent of Democrats, 11 percent of Republicans and 12 percent of independents wanted the laws to be less strict. Most of the rest of those polled did not want any changes.

A [study](#) of Black homicides by the Violence Policy Center (VPC), a national non-profit educational organization that conducts research and public education on violence in America, found the Black homicide rate is more than six times that of whites.

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Using FBI figures, the center said there were 6,469 Black homicide victims in 2010. The homicide rate among Black victims in the United States was 16.32 per 100,000, compared to a rate of 2.66 per 100,000 for whites. About 14 percent of the Black victims were female.

The National Rifle Association (NRA) opposes legislation that would require background checks for gun purchases.

A new [report](#) by the Violence Policy Center titled, “Blood Money II – How the Gun Industry Funds the NRA,” disclosed that members of the gun industry have donated between \$19.3 million and \$60.2 million to the NRA since 2005. Because the NRA is required to report only a range of donations, VPC said, it is impossible to determine exactly how much the organization receives from the gun industry.

In its first “Blood Money” report in 2011, the Violence Policy Center said the gun industry contributed between \$14.7 million and \$38.9 million to NRA, a figure that has increased considerably since then.

The latest “Blood Money” report, issued this month, states: “Despite the widespread cover of *Blood Money’s* findings received after the Newtown shooting, the NRA’s escalating efforts to bring in gun industry dollars, and the growing number of NRA programs ‘sponsored’ by members of the gun industry, to this day the NRA continues to falsely state on its webpage that the organization “is not affiliated with any firearm or ammunition manufacturers or with any businesses that deals in guns and ammunition.””

In a press release, the Violence Policy Center said, “One of these ‘corporate partners’ is Freedom Group, manufacturer of the Bushmaster assault rifle used in the mass shooting of 20 children and six educators at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut in December 2012. Cerberus Capital Management, which owns a 94 percent share in Freedom Group, pledged to sell its investment in the days following the Sandy Hook shooting but has yet to uphold its promise.

“After ramping up its financial support to a million dollars or more, Freedom Group’s leadership was inducted into the NRA’s Golden Ring of Freedom at the organization’s annual meeting in May 2013. The Golden Ring of Freedom is reserved for those who have ‘given gifts of cash totaling \$1,000,000 or more,’ according to the NRA.”

It continued, “A second inductee was Smith & Wesson, manufacturer of the assault rifle used in the July 2012 mass shooting in Aurora, Colorado that left 12 dead and 58 wounded. In a promotional video on the NRA’s website, Smith & Wesson CEO James Debney explains, ‘I think it’s important for everybody to step up and support the NRA. They are our voice.’”

According to the new “Blood” report, high-capacity ammunition magazine manufacturers or vendors who contributed to the NRA included: Midway, with a contribution ranging between \$5 million and \$10 million. Those giving \$1 million to \$5 million were: Beretta USA Corporation, Brownells, Freedom Group, Springfield Armory, Inc., Smith & Wesson and Sturm, Ruger & Co.

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Approximately 50 other gun companies or distributors – including Winchester, Glock, Browning, Colt, and Remington – gave lesser amounts.

Josh Sugarmann, author of the study and executive director of the Violence Policy Center, said in a statement, “Less than five months after the tragedy in Newtown, while families and the entire community still mourned, the NRA was celebrating its financial ties to the manufacturer of the assault rifle used in the shooting. In the wake of declining household gun ownership, the NRA has turned to the funder of last resort: the gun industry itself.”