

Playing with Firearms

A Proactive Public Relations Strategy to Ensure a
Powerful and Profitable Future for the NRA

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Executive Summary

As recently as December 2012, the National Rifle Association (NRA)'s aggressive and combative tone during public appearances following the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School accurately captured the group's disconnect with the majority of Americans. While the NRA's extremist-leaning position allows it to capitalize now on an energized base during a push for increased gun control, as a long-term strategy this damages both the NRA's public favorability and reputational clout, in turn weakening their financial position. A huge camp of Americans, many of them NRA members, support some of the less-restrictive gun measures without calling for an all-out ban on guns (see Appendix 1) – a highly unlikely resolution in any case given the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

The NRA should employ Hill + Knowlton Strategies (H+K Strategies), a widely-respected global public relations firm, to adjust its strategy for engaging with both the public and the media. This investment will not only improve public opinion of the organization and ensure its cultural relevance far into the future but will also turn around the last four consecutive years of falling net income (see Appendix 2). By spending only about \$260,000 annually (see Appendix 3), the NRA will see a return on investment of 1268% (see Appendix 4) from attracting new members, securing highly-valuable earned media placements and increasing overall goodwill as a result of our public relations strategies and tactics.

Background

A History of the NRA

Union veterans Colonel William C. Church and General George Wingate, dismayed by the lack of marksmanship shown by their troops, created the National Rifle Association (NRA) in 1871.¹ In a magazine editorial about the new organization, Church identified its primary goal: “to promote and encourage rifle shooting on a scientific basis.”² Civil War General Ambrose Burnside, former governor of Rhode Island and a U.S. senator, earned the title of the NRA’s first president.³

Given its fundamental goal to improve shooting ability, the NRA purchased a site on Long Island, Creed Farm, in 1872 to build a rifle range.⁴ A year later, the range, named Creedmoor, opened and became the site for the NRA’s annual matches.⁵ New York soon decided that it did not want to be in the business of promoting marksmanship, so, in 1892, Creedmoor closed and the NRA moved the annual matches to Sea Girt, New Jersey.⁶

In 1903, NRA Secretary Albert S. Jones began promoting the establishment of rifle clubs at all major colleges, universities and military academies.⁷ This started the NRA’s youth program, which drew over 200 boys to the annual matches at Sea Girt.⁸ Today, the NRA continues to offer an extensive range of activities and programs for youth, including

¹ "NRA." *NRA*. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 Apr. 2013. <<http://home.nra.org/>>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

partnerships with organizations like 4H and Eagle Scouts.⁹ Soon after, General Ammon B. Crichfield, adjunct general of Ohio, began construction on a new shooting facility on the shores of Lake Erie.¹⁰ Camp Perry became the new home for the annual National Matches, where they continue to be held today.¹¹

The NRA began its political involvement in 1934 with the formation of the Legislative Affairs Division¹² in response to the first major gun control legislation in the United States, the National Firearms Act. While the NRA was not directly lobbying at this time, it mailed out legislative facts and analyses to members, urging them to take action on their own.¹³

Following World War II, the NRA returned its focus to its primary goals as an organization. It created the first hunter education program in 1949.¹⁴ To promote law enforcement training, the NRA established a special police school at Camp Perry in 1956.¹⁵ Then, in 1960, it added the NRA Police Firearms Instruction certification program, becoming the only national trainer of law enforcement officers.¹⁶

In 1975, the NRA officially launched its lobbying arm, the Institute for Legislative Action (ILA).¹⁷ Until this time, the NRA had downplayed issues of gun control, instead focusing on its main goals of reaching sportsmen and hunters. The 1977 elections at the organization's annual convention in Cincinnati proved to be a turning point for the NRA's

⁹ "Youth Programs." *NRA*. National Rifle Association, n.d. Web. 1 May 2013. <<http://youth.nra.org/>>.

¹⁰ "NRA."

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

future, so much so that the event became known as “The Cincinnati Revolution.”¹⁸ The current leadership had planned an elaborate new headquarters in Colorado to promote sportsmanship and conservation, but a radical group that had developed within the NRA wanted to do more to promote Second Amendments rights. These members viewed the current leadership as elites who lacked the conviction to fight against gun-control legislation.¹⁹ There was a clear split in the NRA. One of the so-called rebels, John D. Aquilio, recently told the *Washington Post*, “Before Cincinnati, you had a bunch of people who wanted to turn the NRA into a sports publishing organization and get rid of guns.”²⁰ The radical new group beat out the incumbents, electing Harlon Carter as executive director and Neal Knox as head of the ILA.

New leadership combined with the NRA’s first-ever presidential endorsement of Ronald Reagan in 1980²¹ led membership to triple as the organization entered the new decade.²² However, Knox’s aggressive and brute personality soon created turbulence both within the NRA and among outside groups.²³ Senator Bob Dole, a republican from Kentucky, complained of the NRA: “You have to have a litmus test every five minutes or you’re considered wavering.”²⁴ One day in 1982, Knox came to work to find that he had been fired as head of the ILA and replaced by a much mellower character, Warren

¹⁸ Knox, Neal. “Neal Knox - The Gun Rights War.” MacFarlane Press. 2009: 298–300.

<<http://books.google.com/books?id=dA3pGSYG2yIC&pg=PA298#v=onepage&q&f=false>>

¹⁹ Achenbach, Joel, Scott Higham, and Sari Horwitz. “How NRA’s True Believers Converted a Marksmanship Group into a Mighty Gun Lobby.” *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 25 Feb. 2013. Web. 29 Apr. 2013. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/how-nras-true-believers-converted-a-marksmanship-group-into-a-mighty-gun-lobby/2013/01/12/51c62288-59b9-11e2-88d0-c4cf65c3ad15_story.html>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Barrett, Paul M. “Who’s Afraid of the NRA? Gun Makers, That’s Who.” *Bloomberg Businessweek* 18 Mar. 2013: 48-54. Print.

²² Achenbach, Joel, Scott Higham, and Sari Horwitz.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Cassidy.²⁵ In an interview with the *Washington Post*, Cassidy said, undoubtedly referring to Knox, “There have been lobbyists at the NRA whose zeal has occasionally gotten in the way of their common sense.”²⁶

After Knox’s termination, the NRA experienced a relatively uneventful decade. It created the NRA Foundation in 1990 to serve as the NRA’s charitable arm.²⁷ Friends of the NRA, a grassroots program, exists to raise money for the NRA Foundation.²⁸ Funds donated to the NRA Foundation support “activities designed to promote firearms and hunting safety, to enhance marksmanship skills, and to educate the general public about firearms in their historic, technological and artistic context,” according to Charity Navigator.²⁹

NRA leadership again underwent a change in 1991, with the election of staff lobbyist Wayne LaPierre as executive vice president. While not a gun enthusiast at heart, LaPierre’s steadfast devotion and radical rhetoric quickly made him many friends and enemies in his new role. He still holds this position in the NRA today – and maintains a similar reputation.

In 1994, the NRA faced a major public relations challenge in the form of controversial Neal Knox. Knox, then an NRA board member, published a piece in a gun magazine in 1994 arguing that the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. were part of a liberal plot to justify a government confiscation of firearms.³⁰ LaPierre reacted with a 1995 fundraising campaign that referenced “federal agents wearing Nazi bucket helmets and black storm trooper uniforms” who “seize our guns,

²⁵ Achenbach, Joel, Scott Higham, and Sari Horwitz.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “NRA.”

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ “The NRA Foundation.” *Charity Navigator*. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=search.summary>>.

³⁰ Barrett, Paul M.

destroy our property, and even injure or kill us.”³¹ Many NRA members took offense to this ill-conceived campaign, as it brought to mind the recent Oklahoma City Bombing on April 19, 1995, which killed 168 people, many federal agents.³² In protest, former President George H. W. Bush quit the NRA.³³

Until 1997, the NRA produced two main publications: *The American Hunter* and *The American Rifleman*.³⁴ *The American Guardian*, intended to cater to a more mainstream audience, with less emphasis on marksmanship and technicalities, focusing instead on self-defense and the recreational use of firearms replaced the two traditional magazines.³⁵ This change coincided with the NRA’s rebranding from a membership group for sportsmen and hunters to a powerful Washington industry group. In 2000, *The Guardian* was renamed *America’s 1st Freedom*.³⁶

Amid declining public approval, the NRA appointed famous actor Charlton Heston to the largely ceremonial position as president of the NRA’s Board in 1998.³⁷ Heston’s friendly and familiar face helped reinvigorate the NRA’s position through an active role with the organization. Heston’s signature line, which is still regularly quoted today, came from a speech at the NRA’s Convention in 2000. Heston held a gun over his head and declared he would never surrender it – the government would have to pry it “from my cold, dead

³¹ Barrett, Paul M.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ “NRA.”

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Berkvist, Robert. "Charlton Heston, Epic Film Star And Voice of N.R.A., Dies at 83." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 06 Apr. 2008. Web. 01 May 2013.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/movies/06heston.html?_r=2>.

hands!"³⁸ Heston served five terms as the NRA's President, until retiring in 2003 due to Alzheimer's Disease.³⁹

When the Columbine high school massacre occurred in April 1999, LaPierre adopted a different strategy from the combative tone that had backfired after the Oklahoma City tragedy. At the NRA convention following Columbine, he endorsed totally gun-free schools.⁴⁰ In congressional testimony, he urged lawmakers to expand the computerized background checks of the Federal Bureau of Investigation to include "private" transactions at gun shows and elsewhere⁴¹ – equivalent to the universal background checks debated in today's political discourse. However, LaPierre's empathetic response to Columbine resulted in mostly disdain from the NRA and its members, according to Richard Feldman, a longtime gun lobbyist and former member of the NRA.⁴²

That same year, the NRA ranked No. 2 in Fortune's Power 25, a survey of the nation's most powerful lobbying groups⁴³, and by 2001 had outplaced AARP for the title as the most powerful.⁴⁴ As of January 2013, the NRA had reached 4.5 million members⁴⁵ with \$218 million in total revenue for 2011.⁴⁶

³⁸ Berkvist, Robert.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Barrett, Paul M.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Birnbaum, Jeffrey H. "Under the Gun." *Fortune*. N.p., 6 Dec. 1999. Web. 24 Mar. 2013.

⁴⁴ "NRA Ranked #1 on Fortune Power 25." NRA-ILA. National Rifle Association, 14 May 2001. Web. 24 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.nraila.org/news-issues/in-the-news/2001/5/nra-ranked-1-on-fortune-power-25.aspx?s=%22Fortune%22&st=&ps=>>>.

⁴⁵ "Wayne LaPierre Testimony Before the U.S. Senate Committee." National Rifle Association. N.p., 31 Jan. 2013. Web. 24 Mar. 2013. <<http://home.nra.org/#>>>.

⁴⁶ "NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA." GuideStar. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 Mar. 2013. <<http://www2.guidestar.org/organizations/53-0116130/national-rifle-association-america.aspx>>>.

Currently, the NRA's 76-member board includes 12 lobbyists, ten politicians, nine members in law enforcement or military, eight attorneys, seven celebrities, seven CEOs, and the remaining in other fields or a combination of the aforementioned.⁴⁷

Demographically, 87 percent of the board is men, 95 percent is white and it represents 34 states.⁴⁸ Some notable members include:

- **Oliver North:** A figure of the Iran-Contra and military consultant for war-style video game *Call of Duty*. He calls the NRA "one of the greatest protectors of civil liberties that's ever existed on planet earth."
- **Karl Malone:** The former NBA All-Star told ESPN, "My grandfather once told me if you ever pull a gun, be prepared to fire that gun, because the person you pull that gun on has every right to pull a gun on you."
- **Scott Bach:** Appointed by former-NRA president, Charlton Heston, he has successfully sued New Jersey to overturn handgun laws. On advocating for concealed weapons, "When predators can't tell the difference between the wolves and the sheep, the whole flock is safer."
- **Stephen Hornady:** President of Hornady Manufacturing, a maker of ammunition and hand-loading components, including "zombie" bullets.
- **Pete Brownell:** President of Brownells, the world's largest supplier of firearm parts. He says, "Having directors who intimately understand and work in leadership positions within the firearms industry ensures the NRA's focus is honed on the overall mission of the organization."

⁴⁷ Barrett, Paul M.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

- **David Keene:** Current NRA president and former chairman of the American Conservative Union as well as George H. W. Bush's political director in 1980.

The Face of the NRA: Wayne LaPierre

Wayne LaPierre currently serves as the CEO and Executive Vice President of the NRA. LaPierre earned his BA in education from Siena College and an MA in government from Boston College. Prior to joining the NRA, LaPierre served as a legislative aid to democratic Virginia delegate, Vic Thomas.⁴⁹ When he entered the NRA as a staff lobbyist in 1978, the gun lobby was experience a major shift in mission and vision. Extreme voices focused exclusively on protecting the rights of the Second Amendment had pushed out the group of traditionally discreet hunters and sportsmen.⁵⁰

With a background in academics and politics, LaPierre knew nearly nothing about firearms. Colleagues joked that hunting with LaPierre was more dangerous for the hunters than the ducks⁵¹, making it quite ironic that he controls the most powerful gun lobby in the world.

Since taking to the forefront of the NRA as chief executive in 1991, LaPierre's voice has been equivalent with the voice of the NRA – and many have criticized him for focusing on incendiary, fear-mongering rhetoric. However, a look at his history as the gun lobby's main spokesperson helps explain his position.

Soon after his promotion to executive vice president, LaPierre faced a potential public relations crisis in the form of very inflammatory, conspiracy views of board member

⁴⁹ Barrett, Paul M.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Neal Knox who, in a published piece, implied that the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. were plots by the government to push the need for increased gun control. Rather than clearly separating Knox's views from the views of the NRA, LaPierre adopted a similar anti-government positioning in 1995 by describing federal agents as "jack-booted government thugs" in a fundraising letter. This move earned him extreme criticism from NRA members and non-members, who characterized the letter as insensitive and crude in the wake of the Oklahoma City bombings.

However, when LaPierre responded with a more compassionate and rational tone following the Columbine shootings in 1999, heavy criticism from outspoken members of the NRA resulted. As Richard Feldman, longtime gun lobbyist assessed the situation, "Wayne took incredible grief among the more extreme elements, and he must have resolved, 'never again.'"⁵² According to people close with LaPierre, his incendiary reaction following the shootings at Sandy Hook was an attempt to avoid another situation like Columbine.⁵³ The abrupt change in messages delivered by LaPierre based on the conflicting responses from the NRA's leadership and members represents one of the organization's major public relations downfalls, as will be further examined later.

As a figurehead for one of the most powerful lobbies in Washington, LaPierre appeared on Time's list of the 100 most influential people in the world in 2013.⁵⁴

⁵² Barrett, Paul M.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ "The 2013 TIME 100." *TIME.com*. N.p., 18 Apr. 2013. Web. 29 Apr. 2013.

<<http://time100.time.com/2013/04/18/time-100/slide/wayne-lapierre/>>.

The Role of Gun Manufacturers

Beginning in the 1990s, the NRA made a drastic shift from its century-long position as a membership group for gun owners to an industry group that aligned itself with large gun manufacturers.⁵⁵ The alignment of this powerful group with these profit-heavy businesses created a powerhouse difficult to compete with. Richard Feldman, who has worked in many capacities in the gun industry and the NRA, recently stated, "The idea that the NRA follows orders from the gun companies is a joke. If anything, it's the other way around."⁵⁶

Corporate donations to the NRA have risen in the past decade, which, in no coincidence, has been a period during which the organization has taken increasingly absolutist positions.⁵⁷ While the majority of NRA donors are individuals, since 2005 roughly three out of four of its corporate donors have come from the firearms industry.⁵⁸ Between 2005 and 2012, gun companies donated between \$14.7 million and \$38.9 million, according to pro-gun Violence Policy Center, which analyzed the NRA's records.⁵⁹ For companies that give over \$1 million, the NRA admits them to the "Golden Ring of Freedom."⁶⁰ This past year, the gun lobby welcomed Smith & Wesson to the group, as well as Sturm Ruger, which presented a check for \$1.25 million at the NRA's most recent convention in St. Louis.⁶¹ MidwayUSA, the largest corporate funder with a donation amount

⁵⁵ Ashbrook, Tom. "The Power Of The NRA In America's Gun Debate." On Point with Tom Ashbrook. NPR. 12 Feb. 2013. 12 Feb. 2013. Web. 25 Mar. 2013. <<http://onpoint.wbur.org/2013/02/12/nra>>.

⁵⁶ Barrett, Paul M.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ashbrook, Tom.

⁶¹ Barrett, Paul M.

somewhere between \$5 and \$10 million, created the NRA Round-Up program, which has contributed more than \$5 million to the NRA's lobbying arm alone.⁶²

At a point in the 1990s, executives at a few of the major gun manufacturers rethought their relationship with the NRA.⁶³ LaPierre's fundraising push that likened federal agents to Nazis in 1995 disturbed many of these companies.⁶⁴ Feldman, longtime gun lobbyist, noted, "Gun companies wanted to sell guns to law-abiding citizens and cops. They didn't want to be associated with McVeigh and the black-helicopter crowd."⁶⁵

A day in October 1997 would turn out to be the height of tension between gun makers and the NRA.⁶⁶ Feldman, at the time the executive director of a trade group called the American Shooting Sports Council, organized a televised photo-op in the Rose Garden between democratic President Bill Clinton and senior executives from Smith & Wesson, Glock, and other handgun manufacturers.⁶⁷ As an alternative to a proposed federal lock mandate, the manufacturers had agreed to ship a trigger lock with each handgun – a move praised by the president.⁶⁸ Feldman realized that this gesture of cooperation would be met with criticism from the NRA and joked with the president, "I want to thank you, Mr. President, for offering me a spot in the federal witness protection program."⁶⁹

As Feldman had guessed, LaPierre sent a venomous open letter to all the executives who participated in the event, writing, "Firearm safety – as it's being pressed by the

⁶² Barrett, Paul M.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Administration – is a phony. It is simply a stalking horse for gun bans.”⁷⁰ LaPierre’s paranoia proved to be true to an extent, as gun manufacturers were hit with massive lawsuits in 1998 and 1999 from state and federal governments alike.⁷¹ This attack attempted to imitate the earlier litigation against cigarette manufacturers.⁷² However, while the much larger tobacco companies could afford to settle, defense lawyer fees threatened to bankrupt some firearm manufacturers, as the industry totaled only about \$1.3 billion in sales at the time.⁷³

At the 1999 Shooting, Hunting, Outdoor Trade (SHOT) Show, then-president Charlton Heston declared, “Your fight has become our fight.”⁷⁴ This represented the turning point at which the NRA fully grasped control of the gun manufacturers. In 2000, Smith & Wesson had negotiated a deal with the Clinton Administration that would lead to unprecedented federal regulation and absolve S&W of all their debt from litigation.⁷⁵ The NRA responded by inciting a consumer boycott that nearly destroyed the company, leading Smith & Wesson to renounce the deal and rejoin the good graces of the lobbying group.⁷⁶ In the meantime, the NRA pressed for state and federal statutes that extinguished the municipal lawsuits.⁷⁷ The NRA and its partner companies railroaded Feldman’s group, the organization responsible for the infamous Rose Garden photo shoot.⁷⁸ Recently, Feldman

⁷⁰ Barrett, Paul M.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

reflected on that period for the NRA, “I think you could say that the industry learned a lesson. If you cross the NRA, you will pay for it.”⁷⁹

Intimidation stands as one of the many theories as to the incredible power and clout that the NRA wields over the gun companies. The gun lobby has incited multiple, widespread consumer boycotts against firearm makers that fail to follow the NRA’s lead with sufficient commitment. Or, in a less drastic example, on March 5, the *Washington Post* quoted Steve Sanetti, President of the National Shooting Sports Foundation, as saying that comprehensive background checks “are more the NRA’s issue.”⁸⁰ He added, “From the commercial side, we’re already there, and we’ve been there, and we were the ones that have been the strongest proponents of an effective, complete background check.”⁸¹ The same day, the National Shooting Sports Foundation retracted in a press release stating that the newspaper “incorrectly implies” that Sanetti’s statement put him and the organization at odds with the NRA.⁸²

Further, while many avoid admitting it, the gun companies benefit from the NRA’s hype. Whenever the NRA alarms its members and the general public about imminent nationwide gun confiscations, an increase in gun sales soon follows.⁸³ The months following a mass shooting have typically been the most lucrative for the NRA, indicating that the gun companies felt a profit increase as well. When the media and government put

⁷⁹ Barrett, Paul M.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

more pressure on regulating firearms, the defenders of the NRA traditionally become more passionate and more active.⁸⁴

Public Relations Strategy

Positioning as a Powerhouse

From its inception in 1871 until the 1970s, the NRA had a defined, mainstream, and bipartisan mission: promote police training, firearm safety, marksmanship, and hunting among its members. It had no interest in functioning as a lobbying group. In response to the Gun Control Act of 1968, the type of legislation that today's NRA would consider a major infringement on Second Amendment rights, top NRA officer Franklin Orth wrote, "the measure as a whole appears to be one that the *sportsmen* of America can live with."⁸⁵

However, the creation of the ILA in 1975 and the Cincinnati Revolution in 1977 led to a new face of the NRA. Once controversial and extremist Harlon Carter and Neal Knox took the helm as executive vice president and the head of the ILA, respectively, the NRA began to stand for unwavering support behind one issue: the Second Amendment. Carter, in a letter to the entire NRA membership, wrote, "We can win it on a simple concept – *No compromise. No gun legislation.*"⁸⁶ While the NRA's ancillary programs for youth, police training and firearm safety still exist, they hold very little clout when compared to the incredible power and budget of the NRA's lobbying arm, the ILA.

The NRA's reputation as a powerful and feared group grew out of many factors, but the association's absolutism in their interpretation of the Second Amendment stands out as

⁸⁴ Birnbaum, Jeffrey H.

⁸⁵ Achenbach, Joel, Scott Higham, and Sari Horwitz.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

the dominant influencer. Rather than avoiding fundamental disagreement and accepting compromise, the NRA has embraced controversy as a main tenet of its brand. Typically, the NRA profits on its extreme views during times that the public or its members view the Second Amendment as under attack. Following increased gun control discussion in politics and the media after the Sandy Hook massacre, the NRA claimed 100,000 new members.⁸⁷

The NRA feeds on many single-issue members within its ranks, using fear as the dominant tool to motivate them. A common message from LaPierre is: “We must declare that there are no shades of gray in American freedom. It’s black or white, all or nothing.”⁸⁸ In response to a proposed assault-weapons ban in 1994, the NRA moved further to the political fringe and its rhetoric driven by anti-government activists grew harsher⁸⁹ – a position that has continued to current day.

A recent Washington Post article on the NRA’s stance in Washington accurately captures how many feel about the gun lobby: “Today it is arguably the most powerful lobbying organization in the nation’s capital and certainly one of the most feared.”⁹⁰

Public Opinion Analysis

A December 2012 Gallup poll (see Appendix 5) revealed that the NRA has seen many fluctuations in public opinion since the first Gallup poll on this topic in 1993. Public opinion of the NRA reached its peak of favorability in 2005, with 60% holding favorable views, and saw its lowest in 1995 when only 42% held favorable views. Examining the NRA’s public relations history gives greater context to these varying numbers.

⁸⁷ Achenbach, Joel, Scott Higham, and Sari Horwitz

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

In 1994, led by Neal Knox, one of the NRA's biggest challenges began: the growing influence of "right-wing gun zealots" in the group. At this point in its history, most of America looked upon the NRA as "crazies." The NRA became much more stringent and refused to bend their rigidity on any policy positions, even those against the most vicious types of semiautomatic weapons. Shortly after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and a poor public relations response from the NRA, many longtime NRA supporters, including former President George H. W. Bush and police organizations, left the group and its board. Former NRA president Richard Riley told *The Washington Post* in an interview that year, "We were akin to the Boy Scouts of America...and now we're cast with the Nazis, the skinheads and the Ku Klux Klan."⁹¹ Charlton Heston, a well-known actor, joined in 1998 as the organization's president. His friendly face helped the group reinvigorate the public as it entered the new millennium. Heston left the NRA at the end of 2003.⁹²

Prior to the shift in 1995, the NRA was regarded as an "old boy's club" targeted towards hunters and sportsmen. However, since the NRA's decisive turn, unpredictable revenues and a change in public perception have followed. Richard Feldman, a longtime gun lobbyist and former NRA member, recently stated that the NRA has become a "cynical, mercenary political cult."⁹³ While the NRA posted financial losses in five of the past eight years (see Appendix 2) and public favorability has been decreasing (see Appendix 5), the sheer size of the organization and its historical power have left it seeming largely unscathed. However, even the NRA is unable to delay the inevitable – and it is clear that the

⁹¹ Achenbach, Joel, Scott Higham, and Sari Horwitz

⁹² Birnbaum, Jeffrey H.

⁹³ Dickinson, Tim. "The NRA vs. America." *Rolling Stone* 31 Jan. 2013: n. pag. 31 Jan. 2013. Web. 25 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/the-nra-vs-america-20130131>>.

public took note of the difference between the compassion seen from the NRA following the shootings at Columbine and the combative tone used by the NRA in the weeks after the Sandy Hook shooting.

Beyond the public's opposition to the NRA's radical messages, many other organizations and associations within the gun industry disagree with the lobby's position on key issues. It is also important to note that the messages of the NRA are very different from what the rest of the gun industry is saying. In mid-January of this year, the industry held its annual SHOT (Shooting, Hunting, Outdoor Trade) Show in Las Vegas. Keynote speaker, Steve Sanetti, President of the National Shooting Sports Foundation, boasted about the industry's involvement in computerized background checks as early as the 1980s, years before they became mandatory under federal law.⁹⁴ Rather than focusing on a breakdown of civil order, as LaPierre does in so many NRA addresses, Sanetti discussed the vibrant gun culture within the United States, noting: "Over 300 million firearms are owned by almost half the households in America."⁹⁵ And adding: "Firearm ownership among normal, law-abiding citizens has undeniably increased and over the last 30 years, despite the growth in firearm ownership, the homicide rate has declined by 50 percent, and violent crime has dramatically decreased to record lows not seen since the early 1960s."⁹⁶ Most of the industry reps at SHOT had little opposition to expanding background checks to cover

⁹⁴ Barrett, Paul M.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

private sales, noting that this would primarily deter questionable transactions, rather than impede purchases by law-abiding citizens.⁹⁷

The widening gap between the rhetoric of the NRA and the perspective of most Americans, even of their members, shows its detachment from public opinion. An online campaign promoting gun owners who favor greater restrictions, called “The NRA Doesn’t Speak for Me,” raised nearly \$1 million in donations between Jan. 1 and early March this year.⁹⁸ Recent polls revealed that 92% of the country supports universal background checks for gun buyers and 63% support limiting the capacity of gun magazines.⁹⁹ A May 2012 survey conducted by Republican pollster Frank Luntz among NRA members shows their similar viewpoints: about 75% supported background checks before every gun purchase and nearly two-thirds supported a requirement that gun owners alert police when their firearms are lost or stolen.¹⁰⁰ New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg commented on this disconnect in a recent *Rolling Stone* article, “Their members are much more rational than the management of the NRA. They’re out of touch.”¹⁰¹

The Response to Sandy Hook

On December 21, 2012, a week after 20 children and six teachers died in a mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, LaPierre, in his capacity as the NRA’s main spokesperson, broke the gun lobby’s silence on the massacre with a press conference (see Appendix 6). His speech focused on three main topics: the need to improve America’s

⁹⁷ Barrett, Paul M.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Dickinson, Tim. “The NRA vs. America.” *Rolling Stone* 31 Jan. 2013: n. pag. 31 Jan. 2013. Web. 25 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/the-nra-vs-america-20130131>>.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

mental health system to reduce access to guns among the mentally unstable¹⁰², violent movies and video games as a trigger for increased violent behavior, and the importance of having an armed police officer in every school in America to prevent future tragedies.¹⁰³

LaPierre's speech included many bold statements quickly met with criticism. In a Bloomberg Businessweek cover article on the NRA, reporter Paul Barrett characterized his remarks as "a nationally televised tirade tinged with his trademark cultural resentment and paranoia."¹⁰⁴ One of the most quoted lines, on the topic of armed guards within every school, read: "The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun." LaPierre also contended "Gun Free Zone" signs outside public schools "tell every insane killer in America that schools are their safest place to inflict maximum mayhem with minimum risk." And, when discussing violence in the media: "And here's another dirty little truth that the media try their best to conceal: There exists in this country a callous, corrupt and corrupting shadow industry that sells, and sows, violence against its own people...And then they have the nerve to call it 'entertainment.' But is that what it really is? Isn't fantasizing about killing people as a way to get your kicks really the filthiest form of pornography?"

Many considered the NRA's response so ridiculous and disturbing that it resulted in a notable response from the media. The next morning, the front-page headline of the New York Daily News read, "CRAZIEST MAN ON EARTH" and the New York Post's cover page

¹⁰² Lexington. "Why the NRA Keeps Talking about Mental Illness, Rather than Guns." Lexington's Notebook. The Economist, 13 Mar. 2013. Web. 24 Mar. 2013.

<<http://www.economist.com/blogs/lexington/2013/03/guns-and-mentally-ill>>.

¹⁰³ "Money at the Root of NRA's Blind Eye." Philadelphia Tribune. N.p., 28 Dec. 2012. Web. 24 Mar. 2013.

¹⁰⁴ Barrett, Paul M.

declared, “GUN NUT!”¹⁰⁵ A number of critical political cartoons also appeared during the following week (see Appendix 7). Beyond being a media spectacle, it also deeply upset many Americans – even gun makers. Joseph Bartozzi, a senior vice president at O.F. Mossberg & Sons, a shotgun and rifle manufacturer in North Haven, Conn., said following the NRA’s press conference, “The funerals were still going on in Newtown. Parents were burying their children.” Bartozzi belongs to the NRA and applauds its function as a defender of Second Amendment rights, but even he admits that LaPierre’s response struck him as “ill-timed and graceless.”¹⁰⁶ As gun control debates fired up in Washington, Bartozzi was also turned off by the NRA’s instantly vicious tone. He commented, “The NRA should have waited longer and tried to be more respectful of people who might disagree with them and still be struggling with grief.”¹⁰⁷

LaPierre participated in multiple media interviews in the days and weeks following the NRA’s official press conference to discuss the organization’s response to Sandy Hook. In many, LaPierre characterized America’s mental health system as “completely and totally collapsed” and noted that the NRA backs the FBI-run background checks to purchase firearms and abhorred the fact that many states’ background check results do not reach the federal database.¹⁰⁸ However, he also stated that the NRA contests moving to a system of “universal” background checks, which would impact the nearly 40% of firearm sales that

¹⁰⁵ Achenbach, Joel, Scott Higham, and Sari Horwitz

¹⁰⁶ Barrett, Paul M.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Lexington.

currently occur privately without a check on history of mental illness and criminal activity.¹⁰⁹

In early January, the NRA released a PSA that took attack at President Barack Obama's skepticism towards the proposal that armed guards should be present at every public school in America. The ad painted President Obama as an elitist because his children receive protection from the Secret Service while at school, but he denies this privilege to all American children. Considerable controversy followed the ad's airing; even Republican New Jersey Governor Chris Christie characterized the video as "reprehensible" and "demeaning" of the organization's goals.¹¹⁰

Public Relations Strategy Moving Forward

For continued future success, the NRA needs to position itself as a less combative and extremist organization to improve its favorability in public opinion. While the NRA may hold a foothold now due to its large member count and long history, it should shift to a strategy that will appeal to younger generations to ensure the healthy longevity of the organization.

Admittedly, there are two major obstacles that could threaten such a public relations strategy, which must be addressed in order to fully consider this recommendation. One is its involvement with corporate members. Firearm manufacturers donate to the NRA because it lobbies in favor of the legislation that will keep people purchasing guns at the highest rate possible. For example, universal background checks

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Knox, Olivier. "Christie: NRA Ad with Obama Daughters 'reprehensible'" Yahoo! News. Yahoo!, 17 Jan. 2013. Web. 25 Mar. 2013. <<http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/ticket/christie-nra-ad-obama-daughters-reprehensible-230123003--politics.html>>.

would impact the 40% of gun sales that now occur as private transactions, so expanded checks could threaten the sales within that considerable segment. However, it must be realized that the NRA's true power comes from its membership. If the NRA does not hold onto a solid membership base, then it will lose its ability to effectively influence public policy. Therefore, adopting a position more in-line with public opinion will ensure the long-term power of the NRA, thus protecting the goals of gun companies as well.

The reaction of the NRA's existing base presents the second major obstacle. As seen through the organization's tumultuous history, there has long been a divide between those who support "common sense" reform and those who see absolutely no room for compromise in the gun debate. Further, the NRA often claims an increase in membership following heightened media or political attention to gun control, which some argue proves that it needs to continue its no-nonsense, absolutist position. However, as the liberal Millennial Generation (born 1982 to 2003) ages, their views will become much more influential in shaping public policy. Arguably the most liberal generation in history (Baby Boomers the only other generation coming close), Millennials have led the unprecedented steps taken towards the legalization of gay marriage and supported two elections overwhelmingly in favor of democratic President Barack Obama during the past 10 years.

Unlike the older, more conservative Generation X (born 1965 to 1981), who believe it is more important to protect gun ownership rights than to control the use of firearms (48 percent compared to 42 percent, respectively), the Millennials favor the opposite. Fifty-five percent of Millennials favor taking steps to control gun ownership compared to 36 percent

who favor protecting the right to bear arms.¹¹¹ While there will always be outliers on the fringes of society that the NRA can capitalize on, the Millennial generation as a whole is much more liberal than any generation that the gun lobby has encountered since it's radical messaging shift in the 1990s.

Based on this rationale, the NRA would be remiss to not engage a highly regarded public relations firm like H+K Strategies to provide them with counsel on strategic messaging to move them from a position as feared extremists to respected policymakers.

H+K Strategies would provide the NRA with two main public relations functions: 1) day-to-day reputation management and 2) if needed, crisis communications counsel.

Day-to-Day Reputation Management

A recent Gallup poll revealed that support for universal background checks tops 90%.¹¹² Further, a growing number of Americans support stricter gun laws – up from 43% in 2011 to 58% in 2012 – and those who feel gun laws should stay as they are or become less strict reduced by a combined 14% in that time period (see Appendix 8). While the NRA's membership is solid at 4.5 million, over 283 million people make up 90% of America. Growing NRA membership to include all those Americans is not the goal, but adopting a tone more in-line with the vast majority of America will increase membership and shift the NRA's brand to appear more culturally relevant.

To become a trusted policy organization, the NRA cannot be known for perpetuating falsehoods or trying to manipulate the average American, but it currently faces criticism for

¹¹¹ Winograd, Michael Hais and Morley. "A Millennial Era Approach to Preventing Gun Violence." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 17 Jan. 2013. Web. 29 Apr. 2013. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-hais-and-morley-winograd/a-millennial-era-approach_b_2495023.html>.

¹¹² "Guns: Old Issue, New Hurdles." *SunSentinel*. N.p., 10 Feb. 2013. Web. 24 Mar. 2013.

inconsistent messaging across many fronts. In multiple publications, the NRA insists that it is “not a trade organization” and “not affiliated with any firearm or ammunition manufacturers or with any businesses that deal in guns and ammunition.”¹¹³ However, one can easily find proof that NRA’s corporate donors include 22 firearm manufacturers, many of whose executives have a seat on the NRA’s board.¹¹⁴ In fact, gun companies currently represent three out of four of the NRA’s corporate donors.¹¹⁵

In the NRA’s address following the Columbine shootings, LaPierre stated: “We believe in absolutely gun-free, zero-tolerance, totally safe schools. That means no guns in America’s schools, period.” He even went on to state that the use of the word “guns” in schools should be a crime, just as it is in airports.¹¹⁶ Following the shooting at Sandy Hook, the NRA now calls for armed police officers in every school in America. In 1999, after Columbine, the NRA supported expanded background checks; now it opposes them.¹¹⁷ H+K Strategies will work with the NRA to ensure that the public always receives consistent messages.

Even beyond conflicting messages, LaPierre’s explanation of the NRA’s reason for opposing universal background checks sounds paranoid – he claims that they are a ruse by the federal government to create a national gun register that can be used to confiscate all the guns in America.¹¹⁸ Again, when LaPierre recently spoke about America’s mental health problems, his remarks sounded frenzied: “They’re not serious about prosecuting violent

¹¹³ Dickinson, Tim.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Barrett, Paul M.

¹¹⁶ Dickinson, Tim.

¹¹⁷ “Guns: Old Issue, New Hurdles.”

¹¹⁸ Lexington.

criminals... They're not serious about fixing the mental-health system. They've emptied the institutions and every police officer knows dangerous people out there on the streets right now. They shouldn't be on the streets, they've stopped taking their medicine and yet they're out there walking around...The powerful elites aren't talking about limiting their capacity for protection. They'll have all the security they want... Our only means of security is the Second Amendment. When the glass breaks in the middle of the night, we have the right to defend ourselves."¹¹⁹ Further, while LaPierre initially spoke of improving mental-health treatment, he then used these harsh, divisive words on NBC: "We have no national database of these lunatics... We have a completely cracked mentally ill system that's got these monsters walking the streets."¹²⁰ At the NRA's 2012 convention in St. Louis, LaPierre stated: "We live in the most dangerous of times. America has been infiltrated by terrorists and Mexican drug criminals who are lurking and plotting to murder us." He also attacked Obama supporters for "conspiring with the world's dirty-handed, thug governments" and telling "lies" about the "coming realities" – catastrophic events that he insisted could "freeze our transportation systems, black out our cities, shut down our distribution of fuel and food" and bring an "unprecedented breakdown of social order."¹²¹

LaPierre's consistent aggression and distrust towards the government degrades the NRA's reputation as a trusted interest group. To solve this, H+K Strategies will help the NRA develop rational, fact-based talking points consistent with its goals and then assist in prepping LaPierre before each media or public appearance. If LaPierre speaks off-the-cuff

¹¹⁹ Lexington.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Dickinson, Tim.

and strays from NRA-approved talking points, then H+K Strategies will likely recommend considering a different spokesperson.

In a similar vein, the NRA currently ignores all requests for media interviews and meetings with relevant groups. John Magaw, former head of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), tried to set up many meetings with the NRA in his prior position and was ignored during multiple attempts. Magaw even shared a flight with Wayne LaPierre on one occasion, during which LaPierre refused to speak to him.¹²² From the standpoint of public relations strategy, simply ignoring other organizations and requests from media is not a position any organization should take. Only when confronting a combative group or during a crisis situation is it reasonable to deny comment to all media requests and turn down meetings. During a time of increased transparency and instant communication through social media, it is crucial that the NRA doesn't appear as a self-regarding organization that doesn't even acknowledge the existence of other perspectives.

Working with the NRA, H+K will help develop a clear set of talking points that include a mix of relevant statistics and messaging to use in all situations – from the routine to catastrophic. This brings us to our next area of support: crisis communications.

Crisis Communications Counsel

If any national shooting massacre does occur, the NRA needs to issue a public statement within 24 hours acknowledging the attack and wishing safety on all Americans while avoiding all political issues. A press conference to discuss the NRA's response as an interest group should then be held within the week, withholding all commentary from

¹²² Achenbach, Joel, Scott Higham, and Sari Horwitz

media until after the press conference. Many Americans perceived the NRA's non-response after Sandy Hook as a lack of empathy from the organization.

Then, at the press conference, the NRA needs to adopt a compassionate, not combative or distrustful, tone. As one editor wrote following the press conference, "One of the largest and most powerful lobbying groups in U.S. history, having at its disposal millions of dollars to pay spin doctors and public relations specialists, had an entire week between the Newtown shooting and its press conference last Friday to craft just the right message, and package it in such a way to shore up support among its base, and reach out in sympathy to the bereaved. Instead, they threw gasoline on the fire - in the process exposing themselves as the callous, out-of-touch gun nuts we always thought they were." Following the Columbine shootings in 1999, the NRA addressed the public in a much more empathetic and levelheaded way, resulting in much better public perception. H+K Strategies will work with the NRA to write speeches that inspire praise, rather than criticism.

When the NRA acknowledges the public's seat at the table, it will begin to have a much greater impact on the conversation. Through a partnership with H+K Strategies as a public relations firm to help the NRA communicate its goals more strategically, it will reap the benefits of greater public support and the increased resources that follow.

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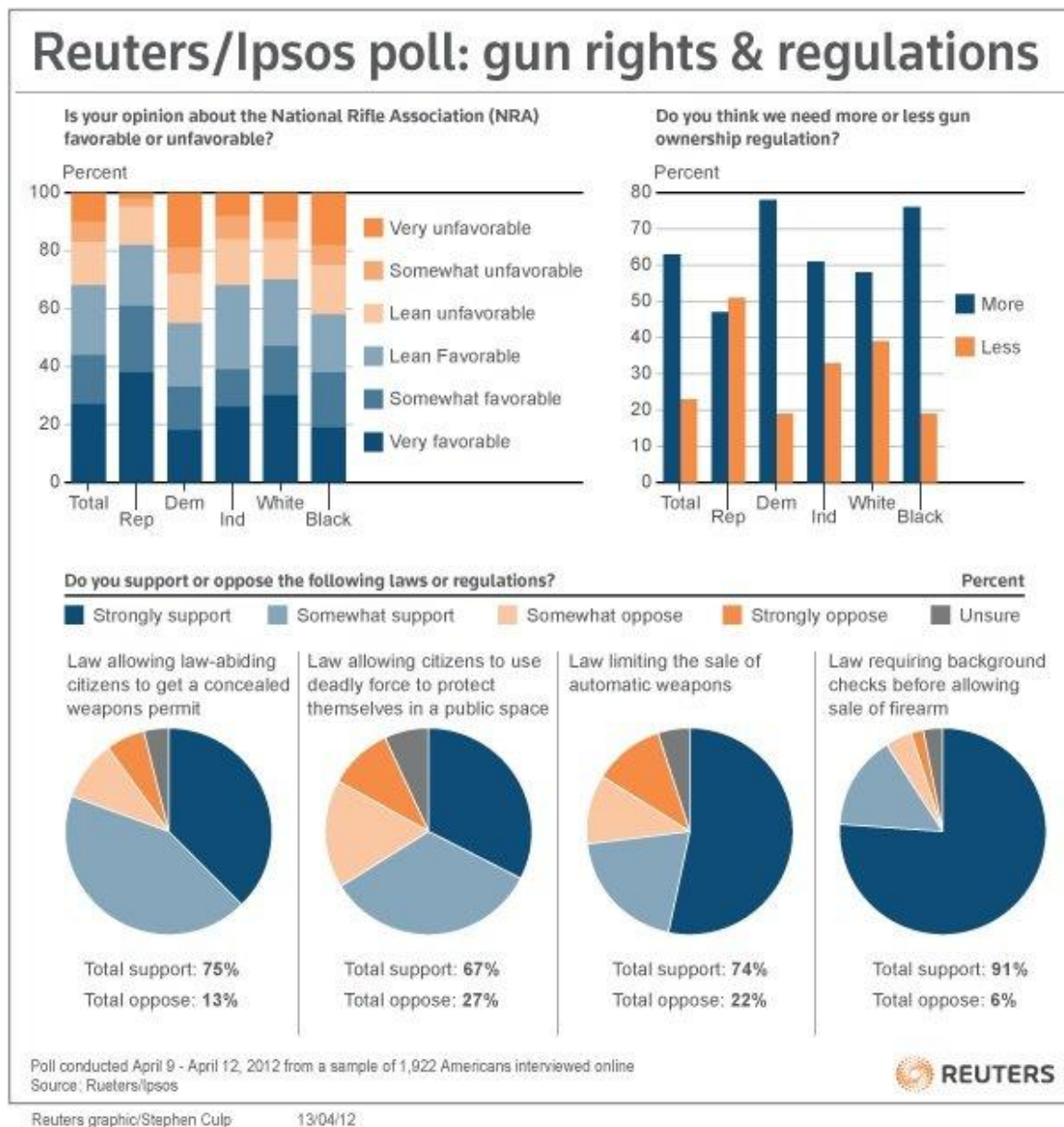
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Appendices

Appendix 1



Appendix 2

NRA Financial Reportings 2004-2011				
	Revenues	Expenses	Net Income (Loss)	Percent Change
2004	170,639,628	182,724,049	-12,084,421	
2005	164,048,679	178,245,629	-14,196,950	17%
2006	165,496,153	177,628,869	-12,132,716	15%
2007	332,270,545	196,097,376	136,173,169	1222%
2008	247,976,782	218,053,234	29,923,548	78%
2009	237,544,504	236,360,981	1,183,523	96%
2010	227,811,279	243,534,275	-15,722,996	1428%
2011	218,983,530	231,071,589	-12,088,059	23%

*Compiled from annual 990 forms

Appendix 3

Cost of H+K Strategies			
Position	Rate	Hours/Month	Total Cost
SVP	\$375	15	\$5,625
SAS	\$220	15	\$3,300
SAE	\$170	20	\$3,400
AE	\$150	25	\$3,750
AAE	\$120	35	\$4,200
Total			\$20,275
20% Additional Intro Month Rate			\$4,055
Plus 5% OOPs			\$1,014
Total Annually			\$259,520

This cost estimate is based on the assumption that a core team of five H+K professionals would work on the account: a Senior Vice President, a Senior Account Supervisor, a Senior Account Executive, an Account Executive and an Assistant Account Executive. The first month rate incurs a 20% additional fee, because extra time will be needed to write the initial messaging document and other one-time expenses. Also, a 5% out-of-pocket (OOP) expense is added to each month's fee to cover extraneous office costs such as postage, copiers, etc.

Appendix 4

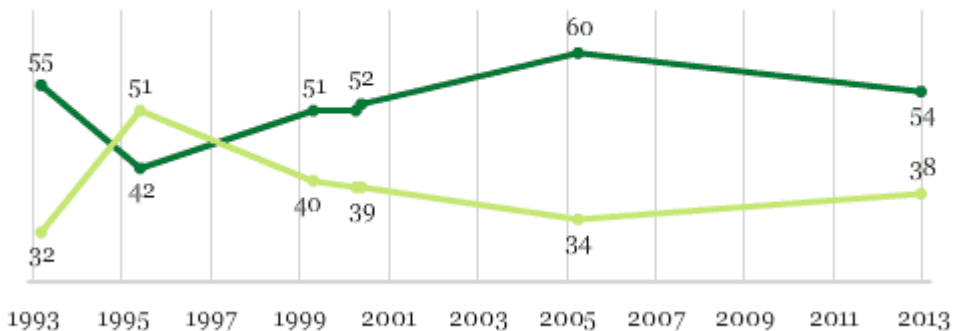
Return on Investment for Hiring H+K Strategies			
<i>Value Provided</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Worth</i>	<i>Total</i>
New Members	100,000	\$35	\$3,500,000
Earned Media	20	\$1,000	\$20,000
Goodwill	N/A	\$30,000	\$30,000
Total Value			\$3,550,000
Return on Investment			1268%

The total value provided by H+K is calculated based on 100,000 new members joining due to better public opinion as result of our public relations efforts. Additionally, H+K will aim to provide 20 earned media placements, which are high-value media opportunities in which an outlet covers the NRA from our perspective (i.e. in a positive tone) rather than without our perspective (i.e. in a negative tone). An additional \$30,000 in goodwill from word-of-mouth and other media or public appearances is expected to be generated.

Appendix 5

What is your overall opinion of the National Rifle Association, also known as the NRA?

■ % Favorable ■ % Unfavorable



GALLUP®

*December 2012

Appendix 6

Transcript of NRA Press Conference on December 21, 2012 following Sandy Hook:

The National Rifle Association's 4 million mothers, fathers, sons and daughters join the nation in horror, outrage, grief and earnest prayer for the families of Newtown, Connecticut ... who suffered such incomprehensible loss as a result of this unspeakable crime.

Out of respect for those grieving families, and until the facts are known, the NRA has refrained from comment. While some have tried to exploit tragedy for political gain, we have remained respectfully silent.

Now, we must speak ... for the safety of our nation's children. Because for all the noise and anger directed at us over the past week, no one — nobody — has addressed the most important, pressing and immediate question we face: How do we protect our children right now, starting today, in a way that we know works?

The only way to answer that question is to face up to the truth. Politicians pass laws for Gun-Free School Zones. They issue press releases bragging about them. They post signs advertising them.

And in so doing, they tell every insane killer in America that schools are their safest place to inflict maximum mayhem with minimum risk.

How have our nation's priorities gotten so far out of order? Think about it. We care about our money, so we protect our banks with armed guards. American airports, office buildings, power plants, courthouses — even sports stadiums — are all protected by armed security.

We care about the President, so we protect him with armed Secret Service agents. Members of Congress work in offices surrounded by armed Capitol Police officers.

Yet when it comes to the most beloved, innocent and vulnerable members of the American family — our children — we as a society leave them utterly defenseless, and the monsters and predators of this world know it and exploit it. That must change now!

The truth is that our society is populated by an unknown number of genuine monsters — people so deranged, so evil, so possessed by voices and driven by demons that no sane person can possibly ever comprehend them. They walk among us every day. And does anybody really believe that the next Adam Lanza isn't planning his attack on a school he's already identified at this very moment?

How many more copycats are waiting in the wings for their moment of fame — from a national media machine that rewards them with the wall-to-wall attention and sense of identity that they crave — while provoking others to try to make their mark?

A dozen more killers? A hundred? More? How can we possibly even guess how many, given our nation's refusal to create an active national database of the mentally ill?

And the fact is, that wouldn't even begin to address the much larger and more lethal criminal class: Killers, robbers, rapists and drug gang members who have spread like cancer in every community in this country. Meanwhile, federal gun prosecutions have decreased by 40% — to the lowest levels in a decade.

So now, due to a declining willingness to prosecute dangerous criminals, violent crime is increasing again for the first time in 19 years! Add another hurricane, terrorist attack or some other natural or man-made disaster, and you've got a recipe for a national nightmare of violence and victimization.

And here's another dirty little truth that the media try their best to conceal: There exists in this country a callous, corrupt and corrupting shadow industry that sells, and sows, violence against its own people.

Through vicious, violent video games with names like Bulletstorm, Grand Theft Auto, Mortal Kombat and Splatterhouse. And here's one: it's called Kindergarten Killers. It's been online for 10 years. How come my research department could find it and all of yours either couldn't or didn't want anyone to know you had found it?

Then there's the blood-soaked slasher films like "American Psycho" and "Natural Born Killers" that are aired like propaganda loops on "Splatterdays" and every day, and a thousand music videos that portray life as a joke and murder as a way of life. And then they have the nerve to call it "entertainment."

But is that what it really is? Isn't fantasizing about killing people as a way to get your kicks really the filthiest form of pornography?

In a race to the bottom, media conglomerates compete with one another to shock, violate and offend every standard of civilized society by bringing an ever-more-toxic mix of reckless behavior and criminal cruelty into our homes — every minute of every day of every month of every year.

A child growing up in America witnesses 16,000 murders and 200,000 acts of violence by the time he or she reaches the ripe old age of 18.

And throughout it all, too many in our national media ... their corporate owners ... and their stockholders ... act as silent enablers, if not complicit co-conspirators. Rather than face their own moral failings, the media demonize lawful gun owners, amplify their cries for more laws and fill the national debate with misinformation and dishonest thinking that only delay meaningful action and all but guarantee that the next atrocity is only a news cycle away.

The media call semi-automatic firearms "machine guns" — they claim these civilian semi-automatic firearms are used by the military, and they tell us that the .223 round is one of the most powerful rifle calibers ... when all of these claims are factually untrue. They don't know what they're talking about!

Worse, they perpetuate the dangerous notion that one more gun ban — or one more law imposed on peaceful, lawful people — will protect us where 20,000 others have failed!

As brave, heroic and self-sacrificing as those teachers were in those classrooms, and as prompt, professional and well-trained as those police were when they responded, they were unable — through no fault of their own — to stop it.

As parents, we do everything we can to keep our children safe. It is now time for us to assume responsibility for their safety at school. The only way to stop a monster from killing our kids is to be personally involved and invested in a plan of absolute protection. **The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.** Would you rather have your 911 call bring a good guy with a gun from a mile away ... or a minute away?

Now, I can imagine the shocking headlines you'll print tomorrow morning: "More guns," you'll claim, "are the NRA's answer to everything!" Your implication will be that guns are

evil and have no place in society, much less in our schools. But since when did the word "gun" automatically become a bad word?

A gun in the hands of a Secret Service agent protecting the President isn't a bad word. A gun in the hands of a soldier protecting the United States isn't a bad word. And when you hear the glass breaking in your living room at 3 a.m. and call 911, you won't be able to pray hard enough for a gun in the hands of a good guy to get there fast enough to protect you.

So why is the idea of a gun good when it's used to protect our President or our country or our police, but bad when it's used to protect our children in their schools?

They're our kids. They're our responsibility. And it's not just our duty to protect them — it's our right to protect them.

You know, five years ago, after the Virginia Tech tragedy, when I said we should put armed security in every school, the media called me crazy. But what if, when Adam Lanza started shooting his way into Sandy Hook Elementary School last Friday, he had been confronted by qualified, armed security?

Will you at least admit it's possible that 26 innocent lives might have been spared? Is that so abhorrent to you that you would rather continue to risk the alternative?

Is the press and political class here in Washington so consumed by fear and hatred of the NRA and America's gun owners that you're willing to accept a world where real resistance to evil monsters is a lone, unarmed school principal left to surrender her life to shield the children in her care? No one — regardless of personal political prejudice — has the right to impose that sacrifice.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is no national, one-size-fits-all solution to protecting our children. But do know this President zeroed out school emergency planning grants in last year's budget, and scrapped "Secure Our Schools" policing grants in next year's budget.

With all the foreign aid, with all the money in the federal budget, we can't afford to put a police officer in every school? Even if they did that, politicians have no business — and no authority — denying us the right, the ability, or the moral imperative to protect ourselves and our loved ones from harm.

Now, the National Rifle Association knows that there are millions of qualified active and retired police; active, reserve and retired military; security professionals; certified firefighters and rescue personnel; and an extraordinary corps of patriotic, trained qualified citizens to join with local school officials and police in devising a protection plan for every school. We can deploy them to protect our kids now. We can immediately make America's schools safer — relying on the brave men and women of America's police force.

The budget of our local police departments are strained and resources are limited, but their dedication and courage are second to none and they can be deployed right now.

I call on Congress today to act immediately, to appropriate whatever is necessary to put armed police officers in every school — and to do it now, to make sure that blanket of safety is in place when our children return to school in January.

Before Congress reconvenes, before we engage in any lengthy debate over legislation, regulation or anything else, as soon as our kids return to school after the holiday break, we need to have every single school in America immediately deploy a protection program proven to work — and by that I mean armed security.

Right now, today, every school in the United States should plan meetings with parents, school administrators, teachers and local authorities — and draw upon every resource available — to erect a cordon of protection around our kids right now. Every school will have a different solution based on its own unique situation.

Every school in America needs to immediately identify, dedicate and deploy the resources necessary to put these security forces in place right now. And the National Rifle Association, as America's preeminent trainer of law enforcement and security personnel for the past 50 years, is ready, willing and uniquely qualified to help.

Our training programs are the most advanced in the world. That expertise must be brought to bear to protect our schools and our children now. We did it for the nation's defense industries and military installations during World War II, and we'll do it for our schools today.

The NRA is going to bring all of its knowledge, dedication and resources to develop a model National School Shield Emergency Response Program for every school that wants it. From armed security to building design and access control to information technology to student and teacher training, this multi-faceted program will be developed by the very best experts in their fields.

Former Congressman Asa Hutchinson will lead this effort as National Director of the National School Shield Program, with a budget provided by the NRA of whatever scope the task requires. His experience as a U.S. Attorney, Director of the Drug Enforcement Agency and Undersecretary of the Department of Homeland Security will give him the knowledge and expertise to hire the most knowledgeable and credentialed experts available anywhere, to get this program up and running from the first day forward.

If we truly cherish our kids more than our money or our celebrities, we must give them the greatest level of protection possible and the security that is only available with a properly trained — armed — good guy.

Under Asa's leadership, our team of security experts will make this the best program in the world for protecting our children at school, and we will make that program available to every school in America free of charge.

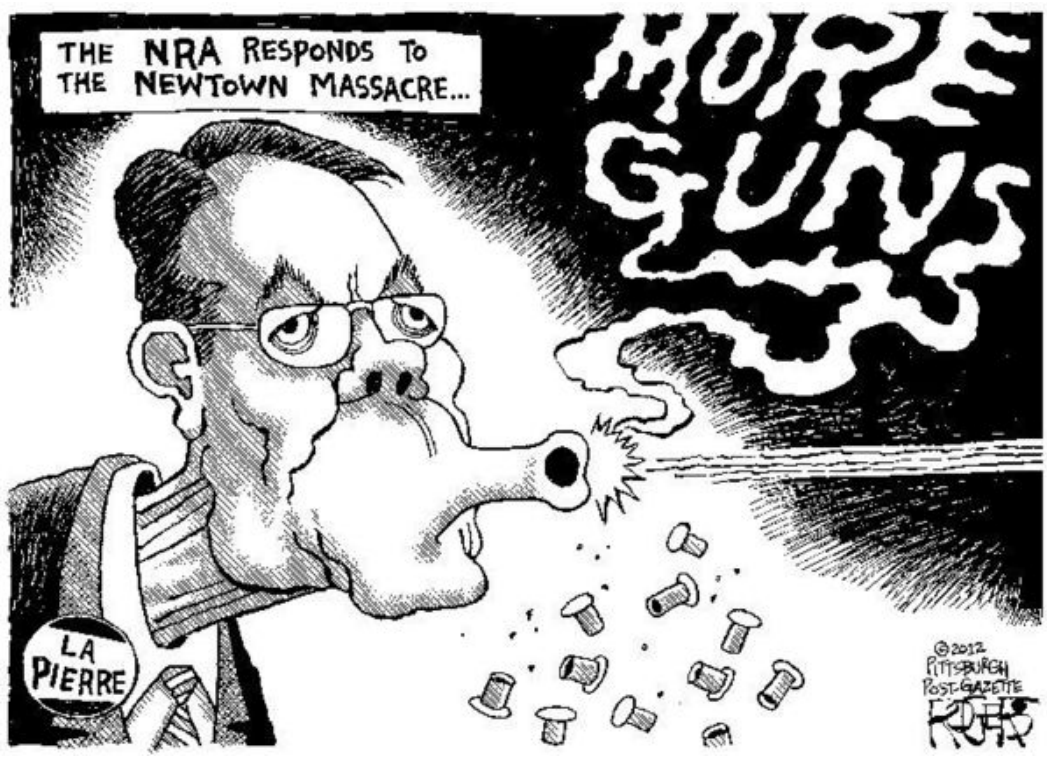
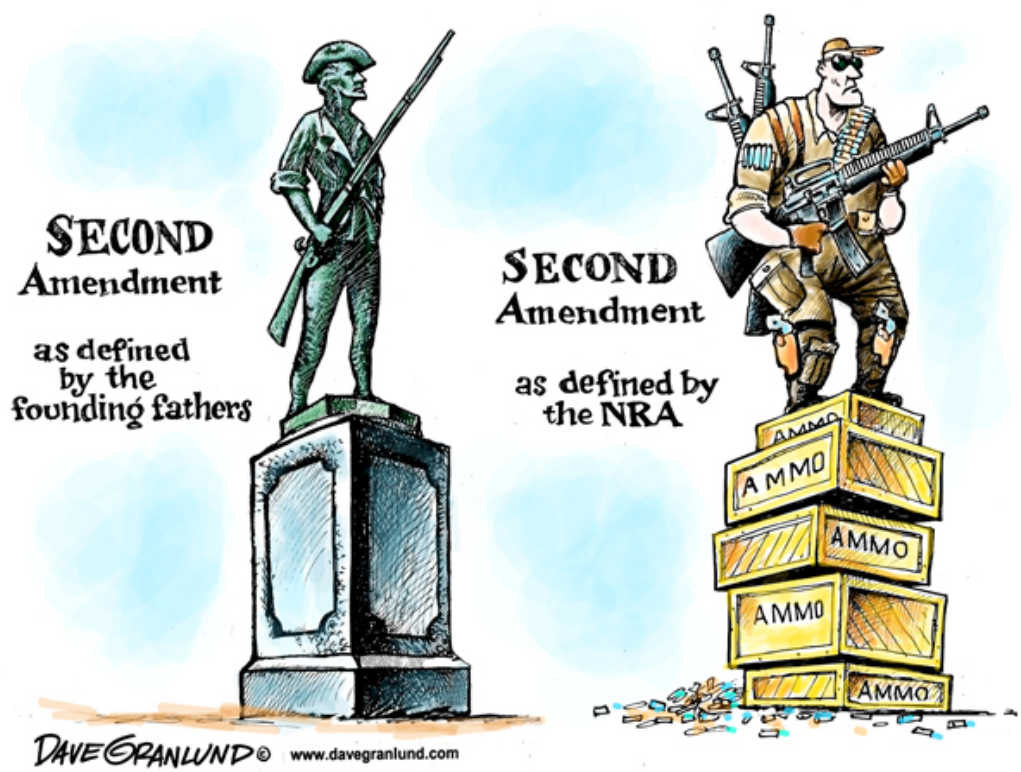
That's a plan of action that can, and will, make a real, positive and indisputable difference in the safety of our children — starting right now.

There'll be time for talk and debate later. This is the time, this is the day for decisive action.

We can't wait for the next unspeakable crime to happen before we act. We can't lose precious time debating legislation that won't work. We mustn't allow politics or personal prejudice to divide us. We must act now.

For the sake of the safety of every child in America, I call on every parent, every teacher, every school administrator and every law enforcement officer in this country to join us in the National School Shield Program and protect our children with the only line of positive defense that's tested and proven to work.

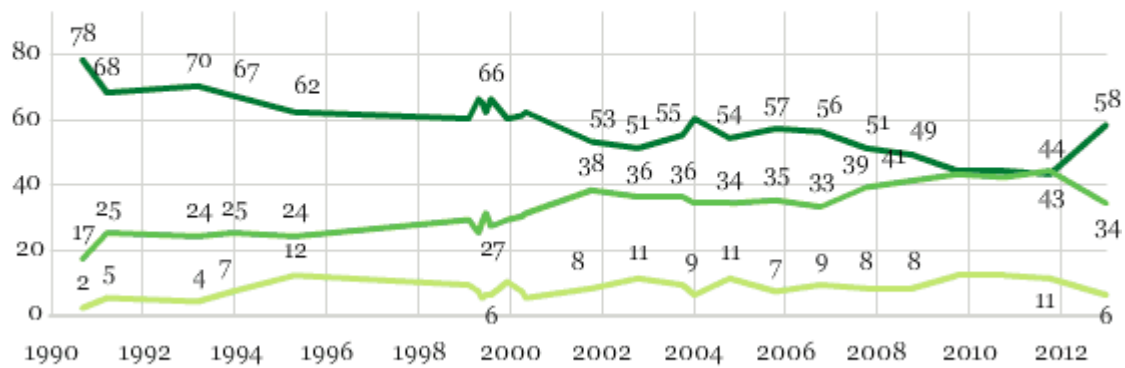
Appendix 7*Political Cartoons Following NRA Sandy Hook Press Conference*



Appendix 8

In general, do you feel that the laws covering the sale of firearms should be made more strict, less strict, or kept as they are now?

■ % More strict ■ % Kept as now ■ % Less strict



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*from December 2012