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WEBINAR

THE VIOLENCE INSIDE US
A BOOK CONVERSATION WITH SENATOR CHRIS MURPHY

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THE HONORABLE CHRIS MURPHY (D-CT)
U.S. Senate

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. RAY: Hello. I'm Rashawn Ray. I'm a David M. Rubenstein fellow in Governance Studies here at the Brookings Institution. I'm also a professor of sociology at the University of Maryland in College Park. I have the distinguished honor today to have with me Senator Chris Murphy from the great state of Connecticut.

A few things to actually note about Senator Murphy is not only is he what we would consider the junior senator from Connecticut, he's dedicated his life to public service and also an advocate for Connecticut families, which is one of the things that we'll be talking about today as it relates to gun violence.

Senator Murphy has been a strong voice in the Senate fighting for job creation, affordable healthcare, education, and, of course, sensible gun laws and even forward-thinking and forward-looking foreign policy. As a member of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, Senator Murphy has worked to make college more affordable and ensure that our public education system works to serve all students.

Senator Murphy has also led bipartisan efforts to reform our mental health system, working across the aisle to create mental health bills in the Senate over the past years. Senator Murphy has laid out, also, things in regards to how we should think about gun violence in light of the tragic shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, which I imagine is one of the main things, based on what I read in the book, that led him to write this book that we'll be talking about today.

You might also know Senator Murphy from his time in the Senate standing up for being a champion for a number of bipartisan bills as it relates to background checks and keeping guns out of the hands of criminals.

Prior to going to the Senate, Senator Murphy served in Connecticut's 5th Congressional District for three terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. And I would be remiss if I didn't say that, similar to myself, he also has two sons and is married, so those are our similarities. And I'm sure similar to myself, for Senator Murphy, our families are at the forefront of what we do.

Senator Murphy, thank you for joining us today. I want to start by asking you, and I read this book with a lot of enthusiasm and a lot of interest, and I hope that -- I'm sure a lot of other people will,

as well, what really inspired you to write this book? Why at this particular time was it necessary?

SENATOR MURPHY: Well, Professor Ray, thank you so much for having me. Thanks to Brookings for having me back. I'm really looking forward to this discussion. I'm glad it sounds like we have a big audience today virtually.

This is obviously a book that springs forth from my experience in 2012. I make clear early on that this isn't a book about Sandy Hook. That's a story for others to tell. But it is a story about my awakening to an epidemic of gun violence in this country that I, frankly, should have been paying much closer attention to prior to the events of December of 2012. And I talk early on in the book about two moments, and I'll sort of frame the book through that prism.

The first is that day when the shooting happens in Sandy Hook, and we all think to ourselves how on Earth could someone do something like that? How could a human being decide to walk into a first grade classroom without any definitive motive and kill 20 beautiful kids and 6 educators who are protecting them? And so, the book is called *The Violence Inside Us* because it is an attempt to explain why human beings are violent and why Americans are more violent historically than any other sort of high-income nations.

And so, it begins with a sort of exploration of the biology of violence, of America's unique history of violence, all as a way to explain how we've gotten to this moment today. And it really is sort of about me sharing my education process over the last seven years.

But the second part of the early stages of the book, the second story that I think explains why I wrote it, is a visit that I made about two months after Sandy Hook. I got invited to a community center a stone's throw from my house here in Hartford in which I was met by dozens of angry parents of children who had fallen in the epidemic of gun violence that had been raging in that neighborhood for decades.

And they said to me, listen, Chris, we grieve for these families in Sandy Hook harder than anyone else because we know the pain of losing a child. But why on Earth did it take Sandy Hook for you to show up here? You've been in public office for over a decade and now you're coming to listen to our pain?

And it was a second wake-up call for me that I had grown up just a stone's throw from

that neighborhood and didn't understand enough, didn't care enough about what was happening in our cities.

And so this ends up being a book about mass violence. It ends up being a book about race. It ends up being a book about firearms. It's an attempt to comprehensively explain why violence happens at these epidemic rates. It charts my development as someone who didn't work on this issue to someone who now, I hope, is a champion. And then in the end, it points the way forward. It talks about the growth of our movement and the policies that we need to fight for, some related to guns, some related to more systemic injustices in our society that can make us a less violent nation.

I hope that in the end it's a primer that helps folks to want to become more educated on this issue, who want to become more effective advocates, to do just that. I hope in the end this book and its reach is what helps us turn the corner on some of the policy interventions that I identify late in the book as the things necessary to get our hands around this violence that does inescapably sit inside us as human beings and as Americans.

MR. RAY: Yeah. I mean, I would say that your book does much more than -- and I think that extends well beyond just being a primer. So, I think people should definitely look at it for a personal touch, as well as a policy standpoint.

I just want to tell people tuning in with us that if you have questions for Senator Murphy, please email them to events@brookings.edu. That's events@brookings.edu, or you can follow the conversation on Twitter @BrookingsGov. So, @BrookingsGov, or you can also Tweet with the hashtag #ViolenceInUs *[sic]* after the book.

So, Senator Murphy, one of the things that we know is that America has actually become less violent over time and, of course, there are a lot of theories as to why that's the case. The research I've done suggests that it has a lot to do with education and work infrastructure and scaling those things up compared to some of the other factors that people might think about related to more policing or more incarceration and those sort of things.

But one pattern that hasn't necessarily followed that is mass shootings. We have seen over the past couple of decades, and, of course, people highlight Columbine, which happened a little over 20 years ago, as being one of the main ways we've seen that. How do you make sense of this pattern? I

know you unpacked this very, very well in the book. Can you share with us how you make sense of violent crime decreasing in our country over the past 25 years or so, but mass shootings significantly increasing?

SENATOR MURPHY: Well, I think this is really important and I think that a lot of people will find it's some of the most interesting material in the book. Because I want to tell the story of American violence, but I spend a little time early on telling the story of global violence.

And the story of global violence is a story in which for hundreds of years we have been figuring out ways to overcome this primal instinct towards violence. The first chapter in the book is about the biology of violence just so we understand why we have all at some point in our life felt that moment of rage, that desire to lay hands on someone else. That's connected to just our circuitry that lies inside us.

But we have become a wildly less violent world over the last 600 years because we've figured out ways to resolve our conflicts in ways other than violence and to try to moderate those influences. And so, there's this global decline in violence over the course of 500 years, but then in the United States, as you mentioned, there has also been a decline in rates of violence, although in our country, it hasn't been as consistent. There have been peaks and valleys over the years.

And so, in this book I explain the reasons for these waves of violence. There's a wave of violence in America in the mid 1800s. There's another wave of violence in America in the 1920s and '30s. And then there's a final wave of violence in the United States in the '60s and '70s and '80s. And there are a big set of explanations for it.

I think you've hit the nail on the head that much of it is connected to this inability to unwind poverty and violence. What we know is that it's poverty and income and economic opportunity that is, over time, most connected to violence. You're just more likely to be the victim of a homicide or a suicide or a domestic violence incident if you're poor. And so, as we've had more success in untrapping people from poverty as America has grown, we have seen violence rates decline.

But there's also no question that our firearms laws have something to do with it, as well. The two great declines in violence in this country in the last 100 years, not coincidentally, come right after the two biggest gun control laws passed in the last century, in the late 1930s and in the mid 1990s.

You asked this question of, so, why are we in the middle of an epidemic of mass

shootings? And I spend a chapter in the book talking about it. There is clearly a story here related to gun laws. It's not coincidental all is well that as soon as the weapons of mass destruction were more widely available, these mass shootings started to occur again. There's a lot of data and anecdotal evidence to suggest that many of these mass shooters would never sort of come up with this perverse kind of courage to initiate a mass shooting if they just had a pistol instead of an assault weapon.

There's also an interesting study of this sort of current generation today and the -- it's a difficult conversation to have, but the way in which sort of an increase in narcissism and an increase in attraction to a celebrity culture starts to take broken brains and move them towards mass slaughter.

There also an element here connected to the way in which it is a lot easier to become a social outcast in a culture of young people in which social media and other mechanisms can sort of shove kids to the side.

And then lastly, there's a copycat element to these mass shootings. There's tons of evidence to suggest that these mass shooters just copy what has happened before. And our inability to sort of step in and send a clear moral signal of condemnation with some federal legislation that is meaningful allows for that cycle to continue.

So, it's a complicated story, but it's elements of social isolation. It's elements of access to weapons. It's a copycat culture. And then it's a failure of the federal government to step in and offer any kind of serious rejection of this behavior through legislation.

MR. RAY: Yeah. I mean, the points you just brought up, you really highlight how complicated this issue is. And, of course, early on, you talk about the rage instinct that is in everyone and potentially what we do to deal with that.

And we had a question from Chris Sprouse (phonetic), and I'm curious your response to it. So, what is your response to people who say that, look, I get all these changes over time, but if we look at American history in particular, America is simply a violent country. And as you write in the book, "Americans are 20 times more likely to die from gunshot wounds than citizens of any other country over the 20 most prosperous nations in the world."

You also says that Americans are seven times more likely to die from violent crime compared to those in other countries and the gun homicide rate is 27 times higher. I mean, you know, as

a person who does stats, trying to graph that 27 times higher is extreme.

So, what is your response to people like Chris, who say that America is simply a violent country? I mean, this seems to be part of America's exceptionalism, that there are some amazing things that we are exceptional for. But gun violence, the Second Amendment, particularly when we compare ourselves to other countries, is also part of this American exceptionalism.

SENATOR MURPHY: Well, listen, I make the argument in this book that America is likely to be a more violent nation. And yet, that is not an inevitability. This is not a sort of reason for us to give up. It, in fact, imposes upon us a duty to take steps to try to counteract our history of elevated levels of violence.

And I spend a good part of the beginning book sort of going into detail about this history. So, America for our first 80 years is not more violent than the rest of the world, in particular our European neighbors. It's only in the sort of middle 1800s that we start to sort of have our violence rates move off the chart, and we have never come back down to Earth since.

So, what's happening in the mid-1800s and how does that sort of explain this exceptionalism of American violence? Well, there are three things that are happening at that point.

One, it's at the backend of the explosion in the slave population in the United States. After the invention of the cotton gin, we have a dramatic increase in the number of people in this country who are enslaved, and that requires a level of violence in this country of absolutely cataclysmic proportions. And so, America becomes, unfortunately and tragically, numb in some way, shape, or form to violence because it is the organizing principle of our economy. And what you see is that while most of the violence is being perpetuated by Whites against Blacks, White-on-White violence starts to increase dramatically during this time because it just becomes something that isn't the ordinary course of business in the United States.

The second thing that happens during this time is we have huge new groups of immigrants coming to the United States. And, unfortunately, again, what history tells us is that when you have different ethnic groups in sort of close proximity to each other battling for economic space, you can have a higher level of resulting violence, in part because of this sort of biological instinct to associate yourself with a tribe or a group and, unfortunately, sort of see others with a degree of fear.

And then lastly, the invention of the handgun. The handgun is invented during this time. The industry really sort of grows bigger in the United States than anywhere else. And America very quickly becomes awash in guns because we make a decision not to regulate it in this country in the way that others do.

And so, if you sort of understand the growth of American violence through that prism, then it starts to tell you how to attack it. Right? If you are honest about America's racist underpinnings, then you understand how important taking on that system of oppression is to lower violence rates. If you understand how different ethnic groups are competing for economic space to try to avoid poverty and unemployment, then you understand why building a more equitable economy, so that there isn't those very aggressive contests before individuals, how important that is for the reduction of violence.

And then finally, firearms. If we actually finally get serious about controlling firearms in this country in a way that we haven't since the invention of the handgun, that is clearly part of the path forward.

MR. RAY: You know, I really want to follow up on this point. One thing, exactly what you just said is one of the things that I found most fascinating about the book. Look, I'm an academic. I'm a sociologist. I specialize in social psychology and race. The way that you talked about two theories that at least in all of my classes come to the forefront, you're really talking about group threat theory on one hand and conflict theory on the other hand.

For conflict theory, to your point, when there are different groups who come in contact and there is enough people from whatever place, whatever othering we want to do -- because one of the things I really liked about the book, as well, is you took us out of this kind of individual notion. You started there talking about biology, talking about the rage instinct. And then as people progress through the book they'll see the way that you really highlighted, look, this is about how we think about groups. And then this is also how we think about policy.

So, as immigrant groups come in, as different groups come in, to your point, fighting for scarce resources, then that lends itself to group threat theory, which is when a group from the outside comes in, they pose an economic, political, and cultural threat. And it could be argued that that's happening now and that's continued to happen because America is a country of immigrants.

One of the things I want to touch on because I found -- I mean, I found several things really compelling, but one thing that I really found compelling was you talked about or you cited W.E.B. DuBois, who, of course, one of the foremost thinkers, first Black person, but a sociologist who guided his -- first Black person to get a Ph.D. from Harvard. But you highlighted the lynching of Sam Hose in 1899. And so, you put a historical spin on how we should be thinking about what we normally call Black-on-Black crime. And you even just did it just now. You talk about the 1873 massacre that essentially ended Reconstruction.

And I'm wondering if you can help unpack this for us because I think it's important for people to have a historical context for the way we think about crime and even the way we think about Black-on-Black crime and why we don't say White-on-White crime when it's all just crime. And to your point, it's impacting people in different ways. And you talk about, to a certain extent, the legacy of slavery, but also the role that lynching played in our -- in us being immune to violence.

SENATOR MURPHY: Yeah. And, again, I think that's a really important principle to understand is that because America is sort of bathed in violence from the start, right, and it begins with the slaughter of Native Americans by settlers, it transitions to the brutal enslavement of millions of African Americans, it transitions to Jim Crow and the lynching culture, and then moves today to mass incarceration, which is just violence by a different name. What we see is this long history of institutional violence, the usage of epidemic levels of violence, mirrored nowhere else in the high-income world, by what I sort of refer to in this book as "in groups" to control and keep oppressed "out groups." And that's probably a fairly sort of coarse way to explain this phenomenon, but all that has happened over the years is that the mechanism of violence has transitioned from one kind to another.

But because we have sort of never gotten over this normalization of violence in this nation, because we have been inculcated with a celebration of violence, right, only in this nation is the gun a romantic object. Right? Only in this nation do we associate a killing machine with ideas like freedom and liberty. All of that together just sort of allows us to sort of push the violence off of our shoulder instead of recognizing how ridiculous it is that the homicide rate in this country is 20 times higher than other nations.

And what I'm trying -- and people who watch me on TV probably see me talking about

guns all the time. What I'm trying to do in this book is say, listen, it's bigger than guns. Right? Guns gets you the biggest return on your investment, but that still leaves you as a massive global outlier. Unless you're taking on our economic system and our long-time system of racial oppression, then you aren't ultimately attacking the real set of drivers of American violence.

MR. RAY: Yeah. I mean, look, in groups, out groups, that's exactly how I teach it. And when I was reading this book, I was thinking this will be a phenomenal book to assign to the students that I teach. And I think that other professors will feel the same way, I mean, because it's very -- it's an easy read, but it's easy in the sense that you're talking about a difficult topic. So, the more difficult topic, the easier it needs the delivery is. But you don't dumb down in any way the science. So, the way you just framed it as in group and out group, that just gets me excited as a social psychologist who does this. I love the language.

And on that front, let's kind of stick with this theme and then we'll transition to talking about, of course, Sandy Hook. I think people definitely want to hear your reaction to that and how we think about the NRA and gun reform. But slightly before we get there, let's continue this theme and talk about, you know, crime, particularly in urban areas.

When you started today, you talked about how after Sandy Hook there were parents who came up to you talking about that. Look, our families are impacted by violence all the time. And the first thing I hear studying this is that there is some type of way or narrative that people who live in urban areas, particularly Black people, don't care about violent crime. And I think you can attest that that's completely not the case.

But one thing you say that's very compelling, you talk about how a 21-year-old Black man is more likely to be shot in America than a soldier in Syria. And that was very compelling for me. And so, I'm curious what your response is to people who say that, look, in the urban areas, particularly Black people, they're just prone to violence. They're just prone to the rage instinct. They just have it more in them.

And I'm wondering in your response, because one of the things that I appreciated about what you did is you talked about the role that Richard Nixon and Agnew had in regards to funding and kind of perpetuating the underinvestment of Black neighborhoods and the role that that played in this

process.

SENATOR MURPHY: Yeah, this is really, really important and I do spend some time in the middle of the book trying to dispel this mythology that exists and make people sort of understand why it exists. In fact, the opening story of the book is the story not of Sandy Hook, but of this young man, Shane Oliver, who gets killed in Hartford, Connecticut. And it talks about how his father, Sam Saylor, who's a major character in this book, a pastor in the north end of Hartford, how Sam says, listen, we pay attention to how violence in the cities gets marginalized. Right? We pay attention to the fact that when a kid goes missing in the north end of Hartford, nobody cares. But if it's a white girl with blonde hair and pigtails who goes missing in a suburb, it's on the evening news all the time.

When I was trying to find information about some of the murders that I wanted to write about in places like Baltimore, I could barely find a single article about it. A young man drops off his two twin daughters at school in East Baltimore on the day I was visiting the school. And while I'm there the lights go off and the sirens go on and they start yelling Code Green, Code Green. I come to find out that this young man who had dropped his two daughters off, before he walked back into his house was shot dead. And his daughters, who were, you know, maybe giggling at his instructions, stopped in the middle of the day as the lights turned off and the doors closed, didn't know that when they got home that night their dad wasn't going to be there.

I couldn't find a single article about that murder that taught me anything about who this guy was. I wanted to tell his story, but it was almost impossible. If that was a white suburban dad who dropped his two twin daughters off in a Baltimore suburb, we would all know his name and there would be specials on CNN devoted to that story.

And so, you know, we have explained away urban violence and crime that occurs in communities of color for far, far too long. And what we, frankly, know is that the data tells us that while it looks like violent crime tracks race -- because it is true if you're an African American man, you are more likely in some places to be shot than you are to go to college -- it really is tracking poverty. You are actually just as likely to be the victim of violence if you're White and poor in this country. If you're Black and poor it's just that we have a system of systemic racism that means more people of color are poor than White people. And so, it sort of shows up in a way that maybe actually isn't true to the statistics.

MR. RAY: Yeah. I mean, yes, very well said. I really appreciate that explanation. And I'm curious at this moment because, obviously, we are in an election year, and there's a lot of people thinking about this as they're watching the news, as they're dealing with COVID. People are seeing what happened in Kenosha. People are seeing what happened in Seattle and in Portland.

And, of course, one of the big things you highlight in the book is the role that Nixon played in this process in terms of how we think about this sort of thing. And I'm curious if you see similarities between Richard Nixon and Trump in terms of law and order, in terms of tough on crime, in terms of how we think about the silent majority, and in particular in terms of how we should think about violence right now.

You know, I think there are a lot of Americans who are trying to figure it out, that they're seeing these things happen in urban areas that are mostly controlled by Democrats, and then they see this broader narrative that these sort of things are happening in localized areas that are politically polarized. So, I'm curious if you can help Americans think through this, and anyone watching around the world, about how we think about the role of violence and the role that the presidency plays in fueling some of the outcomes we've seen, like what we had happened in Kenosha.

SENATOR MURPHY: Well, you referenced earlier that I used some terminology in this book that would make a sociologist smile. And it is true that I do try to root this book in history and sociology and science, but I'm not a practitioner of the academics in this subject, so I do try to make this book accessible and I do try to tell a lot of stories in this book. It really is a book full of stories.

And I wrote this book a year ago, a year and a half ago, far before the events of this summer. But I did choose to tell the story of the civil unrest in Newark and Baltimore in the last 1960s and the aftermath of that unrest, the studies that were done to explain what actually happened and why it happened, and the way that politicians capitalized on it.

Spiro Agnew becomes, and the story's in the book, becomes Richard Nixon's Vice President not because he was a major national political figure, but because he staged a walkout in the wake of the Baltimore protests that made the news. He went to meet with a bunch of African American leaders, scolded them for not doing more to stop the violence, and walked out and talked to the cameras. And a young aide to Richard Nixon, Pat Buchanan, happened to be watching TV that day and saw the

way that Governor Agnew had drawn this line between him and his office and the African American community in Baltimore. And lo and behold, he becomes the vice presidential candidate, so that Richard Nixon can become the law and order candidate.

The tactics that Nixon used, that Trump is using today, is based on our biology. Right? It's based on our sort of trigger to fear people that are different than us. And so politicians from the beginning of time, political leaders since the beginning of time have played upon that instinct to try to make us think that we have something to fear from a different ethnic group or a different racial group or a different religious group. It's never been true, but, unfortunately, it triggers something inside of us. And Donald Trump thinks that his pathway to reelection is through this campaign of fear.

And it's, I think and my hope is that this -- I didn't release this book purposely during the election, but my hope is that this book and the explanations people find in it to try to make us understand why that fear is still legitimate, where it comes from, and how we overcome it is part of what will make these arguments from people like the Nixons and the Trumps of the world less effective.

MR. RAY: And very compelling. And, again, just for the audience, you can send questions to events@brookings.edu, events@brookings.edu, or via Twitter @BrookingsGov using the hashtag #ViolenceInUs *[sic]*, which is the title of Senator Murphy's book.

Senator Murphy, I want to ask you, I mean, of course, Sandy Hook and everyone knows about Sandy Hook, or at least they should, many people thought, including myself, thought that if something would change attitudes and not just attitudes about guns, but policy about guns, that it would be that unfortunate mass shooting. However, it seemed to do very little.

And people talk about a lot of things and you talk about them in the book, ban on assault rifles, which I think will be important, too, you know, we've highlighted in a sense. But to unpack that, the crime bill included some of these things; universal background checks, which came more recently; restriction from everyone or anyone who's ever been convicted of domestic violence or mental health conditions. These are some of the other things that people have put out there.

As you've highlighted, the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act or the 1994 crime bill, what do you think will make the biggest impact in reducing gun violence? So, I mean, essentially for people who haven't read the book, this is getting toward the end of the book where you lay this out. But

give people a preview of what you think is the most important or are the most important policy reforms to deal with gun violence.

SENATOR MURPHY: Thanks for the question. Yeah, the structure --

MR. RAY: Oh, sorry. Sorry, Senator Murphy, *The Violence Inside Us*.

SENATOR MURPHY: "Inside Us," thanks.

MR. RAY: I keep leaving off the "Inside." *The Violence Inside Us* is the name of your book and so people can use that hashtag #TheViolenceInsideUs on Twitter. Sorry, Senator Murphy, keep going.

SENATOR MURPHY: No, the structure is as you laid out. I start by just trying to set a foundation. Right? Let's talk about the biology of violence, the global history of violence, and then America's history of violence. Then we move to talk about the different kinds of violence in the United States, how they're similar and how they're different. Right? The mass shootings, the homicides, the suicides, the domestic violence crimes, because there's a lot that unites those four types of crime, but there's, frankly, a lot that's different about it in terms of who the victims are and what policies changed the narrative.

And then, as you mentioned, the end of the book is a story about what policies do we need to get behind and what will actually prove for them to be successful at the end?

Yeah, a lot of people thought Sandy Hook changed everything, but that's not how politics works. There are almost no epiphany moments in the history of American political and social movements. What we realized in 2013, when we lost the vote on the background checks bill and I tell that story in great detail in this book, is that the NRA was ready for us. The NRA built up a political powerhouse unlike almost anything America had ever seen and they beat us, not because we hadn't convinced people of the necessity for background checks, but because they had more political power. They had more money, they had more activists, they have louder voices than we have.

We've spent the last seven years building up our own political infrastructure. We don't have one organization, we have a bunch of really powerful ones, from Gabby Gifford's groups to Moms Demand Action, the Brady Alliance. And now we are more powerful than they are. We won in 2018. We beat 30-something A-rated NRA members of the House of Representatives. And we're going to have that

same success in 2020.

So, what do we do with it? And that's, I think, the foundation of your question. Well, listen, I made the argument in this book that you've got to look at the solutions to violence in a comprehensive manner. It can't just be about the guns. So, obviously, I hope our movement is working on lifting up incomes and economic opportunities and access to education for all Americans, but specifically communities of color.

But then I also shove into this book plenty of evidence to show you that if the only thing you did was to have universal background checks or a restriction on assault weapons, you would get a pretty significant reduction in violence. In Connecticut, within a couple of years of imposing universal background checks, crime went down by 40 percent. In Missouri, the sort of last Southern-ish state to have universal background checks, within a year of getting rid of universal background checks their gun homicide rate went up by about 25 percent.

And so, I think we need to do it all, but that one intervention, background checks, that will get you the most immediate, quickest, and biggest bang for your buck. And I explain why that is in the book, so that people know and people can argue the importance of background checks when they're out there trying to get people elected and we're going to vote the right way on that issue.

MR. RAY: Yeah. I mean, very, very compelling. So, I have one more question and then we'll transition to some great questions that we're getting from the audience.

So, before the panel, we got a question essentially about the NRA from Beverly Allen (phonetic), who was talking about how we should frame and think about the NRA. That the NRA -- and you essentially just talked about it, but I think they want you to go into more detail, how the NRA has seemed to block every important piece of legislation. You just talked about that power, like being able to leverage that.

And we know legislators in New York, for example, have called for the NRA to essentially be disbanded. What are your thoughts on what can be done about the NRA's blockage of what many people consider to be commonsense gun reform?

SENATOR MURPHY: I know it sounds like there's an overwhelming number of stories in this book, but I just --

MR. RAY: Oh, the stories are phenomenal.

SENATOR MURPHY: No, and they're all so fascinating I couldn't help but put them in there as a mechanism to educate people. So, the story of the NRA is in here. Right? They start as a pretty sleepy pro gun control organization and then they get taken over in a sort of 1975 putsch of the old leaders by a bunch of conservative radicals, who sort of see the NRA in the context of a broader conservative movement whose goal is to just destroy government and to have no government intervention in our lives or regulation of the economy. And that's sort of the story of the modern NRA. It stopped being just about guns and about some broader ideas about the utility of government.

The problem is that the gun lobby, the NRA, over time sort of got far too out over its skis. And as it became more and more reliant on a gun industry that required them to oppose any and all regulation, and I can get more into why that was, they started to get way out of step with their own members.

And so, we get to this point today where 80 percent of the NRA's own members want universal background checks and their organization fights against it, which has been part of the story as to why the NRA has lost so much political power. They have a lot of internal problems, but they also have just gotten so far out of step with their members and our side has been willing to stick up to them. Frankly, had we sort of stuck -- had we stood up to them, excuse me, had we stood up to them 10 or 20, we might have precipitated their downfall, but we got so scared of them in the wake of the 1994 elections, when mistakenly we thought that we lost control as Democrats of the House of Representatives because of the Assault Weapons Ban, which wasn't true, that we just sort of let them build their power without contest.

Well, now they're much less powerful. Now we're much more powerful. And I think we are about to be able to pass a universal background checks bill in which a whole bunch of Republicans are going to support it and they're going to find out that the sky doesn't fall. Right? That they actually get pats on the back back home; that the NRA actually can't primary them out of existence because they're not powerful enough. And that's going to be a signal to all sorts of other Republicans to just take this issue off the table and fight on other grounds.

I think we might be getting to a point where we sort of flip the presumption. Back in the

2000s, the NRA got everything they wanted because we were so weak as a movement. It may be that as we enter the 2020s we don't get everything we want, but we're going to be able to achieve pretty significant change because a lot of Republicans just decide I don't want to fight Moms Demand Action anymore. I don't want to fight with Gabby Giffords anymore. I just want to get right on this issue and I'll fight with my opponents on other stuff.

MR. RAY: Yeah. Or they say I don't want to fight with Senator Chris Murphy anymore because one of the things that I'm hoping that you can tell us, a part in the book that I found really, really inspiring, and I think that people should hear this story from you. And particularly the way in the book, to your point about telling stories, you brought us into your mind, into your feelings in what you did on the Senate floor. And I remember watching that. I mean, I remember seeing it. And the role you played at that moment to stand up and do what you felt needed to be done, I thought that was a moment. And it was a pivotal moment in how we think about gun reform.

And I'm curious if you could tell people about that story, what led up to it, and just anything else you want to say. But I think it's a -- I found it to be -- as I'm thinking about, you know, assigning it in a class or doing something like that, I could see students reading it and saying, wow, I can make a difference and this can be something that I need to do.

SENATOR MURPHY: It's the last story in the book or it's the second to the last story in the book for a reason. I talk about coming home from the filibuster and turning on the TV, flipping on MSNBC and watching one of my favorite commentators, Lawrence O'Donnell, doing his monologue on me, 10 minutes on me.

And I'm listening to him talk about me, and I detail this in the book, and he goes through my entire sort of political history. And he basically says Chris Murphy is a super careful politician. Right? He's a guy that doesn't bust out of political boundaries. He's careful. He's calculating. He's the least likely person to do what he just did.

And I tried to be really candid in this book, right, about what I believe to be my political failings. And I come to the conclusion that he was basically right. You know, that I was a successful political leader, I was prodigious, I passed a lot of legislation. But I hadn't taken a lot of chances, I hadn't been willing to put my career on the line. And that was, in part, because I hadn't had an issue that I was

emotionally connected to prior to Sandy Hook.

And so, I decided to take a chance that day in June of 2016. I decided to hold a filibuster and refused to sit down until Mitch McConnell had scheduled votes on anti-gun violence measures.

And I remember getting cold feet an hour before. And I texted my friend Cory Booker, who is sort of my co-conspirator, and Cory texted back and told me, man, do it. Do it.

And then I remember getting cold feet minutes before and texted my wife and saying I think I'm about to make a horrible mistake. What if I stand up here and nobody cares and Mitch McConnell ignores me? And I did it anyway because I felt like I had an obligation to those families. And I felt like if I didn't take chances, then what the hell was the point of having a job like this?

And in the end, of course, it was important. No, it didn't lead to a successful vote, but it was the first time in a meaningful way that the anti-gun violence movement drove the narrative. Right? We didn't let the other side set up the story. We created the story.

And the House sit-in happened a couple days later inspired by our filibuster. And all of a sudden, people felt like you could stand up to the NRA and you could be rewarded for it. And I hope that's a small part of the story of how we get to the moment when we pass legislation that actually does change the story of gun violence in this country.

And in telling it at the end of the book, you know, I'm hoping to try to prompt other people to take chances in their own lives. Right? To say, hey, I've got a store down the street from me that still allows for folks to carry weapons into it and I'm going to organize a boycott of that store. And I'm going to get a bunch of grief if I do that, but you know what? This is a small thing that can have some impact. Hopefully, that my telling of the story can give people some confidence to do some thins that are of similar impact.

MR. RAY: I mean, I think it will. It was very inspiring and I think it'll be more than just a small part of the story.

I mean, the other thing that stood out to me as you were telling that story is having what I call a counsel or like confidants. And in this case that was Senator Booker and that was your wife, who both were like, yeah, I mean, come on, like this is the time to do it, you know. And I think we all need that.

And so, you telling that story from your perspective as a senator I think is going to be very, very compelling for people. It definitely was for me.

SENATOR MURPHY: Well, and, listen, I've tried to give a little bit of behind-the-scenes account of what it's like, right, when you're thinking about doing something crazy. And I don't think I've actually told Cory that I include the entire text he sent me that morning in this book. (Laughter) It's like on my to-do list that, like, before somebody sort of mentions to him that I have disclosed a private text he sent to me, I should probably tell him first.

But everybody out there knows how great Cory Booker is, but when you see the text that he literally like wrote to me from, you know, his kitchen counter that morning, it's like poetry in motion -- it was one of the things that inspired me to do it -- you have an even greater amount of love for this guy.

MR. RAY: I mean, without doubt, yeah. Well, I guess the cat's out of the bag now about the text because I see that transcript. And, you know, I spoke to Senator Booker last week and you two have a similar approach in this regard. Like one thing he said last week, he said that change doesn't come from Washington, change comes to Washington.

And when I think about your book and this issue, you brought this to Washington because you were changed in your community as just a human being, as a parent, as a husband, as a friend. And you just happen to have a platform as a senator, working hard to get to that point, to bring this to Washington. But it started in Connecticut.

Let's go through some of these questions because I think they're really, really good. So, Michael, who is a gun violence researcher, focuses mostly on international firearm mortality rates. He's wondering in your research did you find any countries that stand out as societies that faced kind of comparable violence challenges to the United States and is there anything that the United States can learn from them about overcoming that?

So, in other words, you know, in the grand scheme the United States is a relatively young country. I mean, it's not as young as some other ones when you get in the grand scheme, but historically it is. And so, are there other countries that have faced similar structural dynamics to us, with immigration and other things, and have overcame the violence issue?

SENATOR MURPHY: Well, it's a hard question because, you know, part of the case I'm

making in this book is that there is something very unique about the United States. There's no other nation that has our history of racial oppression and subjugation. There's no other country that marries together multiculturalism and democracy. Right? So, it is hard to find other nations that we can draw distinct lessons from, but let me just mention two things I talk about in this book, one general and one specific, that maybe answer that question.

In the beginning of the book, I talk about this long, global downward trend in violence. And one of the things that I point to is the invention of the printing press. And the invention of the printing press is part of the story as to why European violence rates start to plummet, because, all of a sudden, people can understand the lives of people that are different from them. All of a sudden, your tribal instincts, your belief you have to fear those that are different from you, starts to weaken because you have the ability to read about others' experiences. And you also get to read about what it's like to be the victim of violence. And so you start to rethink whether this really is a proper way to order society.

And so, what you learn by looking at how violence dramatically declined in Europe hundreds of years ago is that empathy -- empathy -- is really important. And so, as we seek to try to address our racist past and present, growing empathy, right, thinking about the importance of ending the segregation of our schools, about giving White kids the ability to grow up with kids of color, that grows empathy. And you can see what that did for countries on the other side of the ocean years ago.

One specific instance on the importance of gun control. Suicide is, obviously, raging out of control in the United States today. We aren't as big an outlier globally on suicide rates, but we've seen a dramatic increase, and so we have to get serious about it.

Israel had a major suicide problem amongst its soldiers. I forget the date in which they enacted this change, but it was, I think, a couple of decades ago. And in particular, they were seeing that a lot of soldiers were committing suicide on weekends while on leave.

And so, what Israel did was make a simple policy change to say that soldiers can't take home their weapons on the weekends. And what you saw was a dramatic decline in the suicide rates of Israel soldiers driven by what? The decline of firearm suicide rates on weekends.

Why? Because suicidal thoughts are often fleeting. On average, they only last for 20 minutes. And so, what Israel found was that when they just remove the weapon from the household on

the weekend, suicides amongst their soldiers dramatically declined.

And so, you can find these very specific interventions and examples that we can replicated here in the United States, even -- well, it's probably hard to find another country that has enough sort of societal and economic parallels to the United States to import their entire experience.

MR. RAY: You know, that's a great point. And, I mean, one of the things I study is policing. And I highlight in my work that the mental health challenges that law enforcement has is they're going out, trying to do their jobs. I mean, they're overstressed, they're overworked, they're underpaid. Eighty percent of them suffer from chronic stress, but 90 percent of them never seek help. I think like one big thing is to mandate that they go to psychological counseling. I think that would do a lot.

And kind of on this front, there are a couple of questions. Garrett asked -- because you kind of highlighted the media. You talked about the printing press and the role that that played in getting people information about other people. Can you talk about the extent to which violence in the media, not only in mass media and TV shows and that sort of thing, but also video games plays a role in contributing to the normalization of violence?

Do you rank what we see in the media and kids playing video games from, you know, everything from PUBG to Fortnite, which Fortnite is the number one thing in my house? Do you contribute that in any sort of way to the violence that we see?

SENATOR MURPHY: Well, I do think you've got to hold the media responsible for some of the actions it takes that end up glorifying violence and feeding misperceptions about violence. One study I reference in this book when I'm talking about violence in our urban areas and gun homicides in this nation is that what you probably already know instinctively to be true, which is that when there's a crime committed by a Black man in this country, it receives far more attention in the media, thus giving people the perception that there is more crime being committed by people of color.

Sam Saylor talks about it in this book, how every time that the media covers a murder in Hartford, they say that the suspect is someone known to police. Kind of code for the idea that, hey, don't worry about it, you know, suburbs of Hartford. This is just a small group of Black career criminals that, you know, we just need to deal with in Hartford. You don't ever have to worry about this in Wethersfield. All of it creates this misperception about the origins of crime.

The question about video games is a tougher one. Right? I do think that the general celebration of weapons in this country does add to the numbness that we have around gun crime.

That being said there is no a lot of great hard evidence to suggest that violent video games lead directly to crime. A lot of anecdotal evidence to show you that people, like Adam Lanza, the shooter in Newtown, had a lot of exposure to those video games. But people will point out that these violent video games are really popular in many other countries. Japan, for instance, a country that has really no experience with gun crime and gun homicides. And so, it seems that it may be a contributing factor, but if you can't get your hands on the guns that you use in the video games, then the video games themselves might no be as dangerous.

So, I think the jury's still a little bit out here. I tend to think, you know, just as somebody who watches all of this, that there's a connection and it's something to worry about. But there's some conflicting data.

MR. RAY: Yeah, agreed. So, one question we have from Dick is Dick is wondering whether or not capital punishment in the United States is something that continues to normalize violence in the United States. And if so, is that something that we should just completely get away with altogether?

SENATOR MURPHY: Well, I think it does. I don't spend a lot of time talking about it in this book, but, you know, frankly, it's a reminder that it has to be part of this conversation. I'm an opponent of capital punishment. And from the very beginning in this nation we have seen our reliance on violence as a mechanism to enforce our laws.

That began with the stockades and beatings and whippings. It sort of transferred for a period of time to vigilante justice that was carried out by white-robed marauding gangs in the South to today, where we don't routinely still rely on corporal punishment, but it is still part of our criminal justice system.

I do talk about in the book the way that we still rely, for instance, on beatings in schools. I mean, you'd be shocked, folks that grow up in the Northeast, to find out that there's still 13 states that legalize corporal punishment in schools that allow for teachers to paddle students if they misbehave. It is not coincidental that those states are almost all in the South. It is also not coincidental that it is by and

large students of color who end up being on the receiving end of those paddlings.

And so, there are still lots of ways in which capital and corporal punishment are embedded in our system of law and rule enforcement that sends the signal to everybody that violence is a legitimate means by which to address grievances, settle scores, or enforce hierarchies.

MR. RAY: Yeah. As a native Tennessean who grew up in Georgia, I know that all to well. I wrote a piece in *The New York Times* on that a few years ago about punishment in schools and spankings and, you know, the paddles when you go to the principal's office. I mean, still memories, I'm sure, from some of my classmates and me.

So, we have another question. It's kind of building gup to this. It's from Jen (phonetic). And Jen asks that there is one resounding factor that we haven't talked about up to this point. It's not necessarily about culture or mental illness or a lack of laws, but specifically the term "toxic masculinity," which is the fact that a lot of this is wrapped up in what it means to be a man, the way that boys are socialized to grow up. What do you think about this? What is your response to that?

SENATOR MURPHY: Well, you're right, we haven't talked about it thus far, but it is in the book because you have to talk about all of the different hierarchies that are being protected through the use of violence. And the defining hierarchy in this country is a racial caste system, but there is, of course, a patriarchy, as well, that violence has been used to reinforce for millennia.

And what is interesting is that sort of that patriarchy, that system of dominance that men try to enforce over women is the stickiest of all types of violence to move through public policy. There's something called Virko's (phonetic) Law that I talk about in this book that shows that when you impose changes in rules around the use of violence, homicide rates can move pretty quickly, suicide rates can move pretty quickly, but domestic violence crimes move the slowest, which just tells you sort of how built-in to our psychology and our sociology that relationship, that sort of hierarchical relationship is.

I talk a lot about how we need to broaden the aperture of our conversation when it comes to domestic violence and guns. Yes, there are thousands of women that get killed by guns or injured by guns by domestic partners, but there's coercive violence that's happening in tens of thousands of households.

I tell the story of a young woman who never really feared that her boyfriend was going to

shoot her, but every time they had an argument, or nearly every time they had an argument, he'd just casually take the gun out of the drawer and just play with it and toy with it just to remind her of what could be in store for her if she protested too much. That kind of coercive violence is a big part of the story.

And while it's sticky, what we do know in this country is that states that get serious about background checks or registration of firearms actually can see some pretty substantial reductions in domestic violence crimes. The numbers are, you know, about 25 percent, 35 percent reductions in domestic violence homicides when you just make it a little bit harder for people to get a gun and specifically make it harder on anybody that's got a domestic violence record to get a gun.

So, that story is in this book. It's a really difficult conversation, but there are public policy interventions that really do make a difference.

MR. RAY: Yeah, I want to end on a positive note. We've got a colleague from Brookings, who said what actions can everyday citizens take in our everyday lives to help advance gun reform? And then what persuasive tactics have you found to be constructive in conversations with those who are ambivalent about gun reform and even at times oppose it?

So, this is really what can citizens do? How can we empower people to use their voice? What should they be doing to help with gun reform legislation?

SENATOR MURPHY: Well, I appreciate that, and this book does end on a positive note. I do talk about the growth of our movement. And I won't tell the full story now, but I do end by telling, you know, maybe the most compelling story that I've ever come across in my work on gun violence and that's the story of the teacher in Sandy Hook who, instead of running or hiding or panicking, in the final moments of her life decides to go and wrap her arms around a little boy that she was in charge of in that classroom.

And I talk about her story because this book is called *The Violence Inside Us* and it admits that there is an instinct for aggression that sites inside all humans beings and in particular sits inside of American culture. And we have to admit that inevitability and that reality.

But I end the book by talking about Annie Murphy, this brave teacher, who gives up her live to provide just an itty-bitty additional piece of mind to this six-year-old boy because there is also enormous goodness, there's heroism that sits inside of us. Any my hope is that this book transitions you

from sort of seeing the inevitability of violence to also seeing the inevitability of our ability to overcome that instinct.

And the good news is today, you don't have to search really hard to find ways that you can make a difference. There are anti-gun violence efforts that are waiting for you to join them. There are boycott efforts against companies that are still investing in gun companies or allowing for concealed weapons to be brought onto their premises that you can join. There are candidates out there, more than ever before, who are asking for your vote based upon their history of activism in the anti-gun violence movement. So, whether it's by becoming a commercial actor, a political actor, a philanthropic actor, there's so many different ways that you can be a part of this movement.

And what I tell people all the time is to not worry too much about perfectly calibrating your action to the one that is going to have the biggest difference. Just do something. Just every day or every other day do something that advances this cause. Put a post up on your Facebook page. Make a $2 donation to a candidate who's raising up the issue of gun violence. Just be a regular activist and you will, in the end, make a difference. You know why? Because there are millions of other people who are thinking about doing the same thing.

And that's where the book ends, with the idea that violence is inside us, but so is the ability to overcome that violence. Both of those things lies inside of human beings. And my hope is that folks will buy this books, they'll access it, and it'll help them understand how to be a more effective advocate.

MR. RAY: I think that is a great way to close. Be a regular activist, like normalize it, that there are things that you can do in your life.

Senator Murphy, this has been a great conversation. It's been an honor for me to have a conversation with you. And I could tell everyone out there, get this book, "The Violence Inside Us: A Brief History of an Ongoing American Tragedy." It will help shape how you think about gun reform. It will help shape how you think about violence more broadly . And I think that it will also move you to do something.

So, thank you all for joining us today. Senator Murphy, thank you for taking the time out of your day, out of your busy day, to join us. And we look forward to future interactions with you. And

everyone can look at the Brookings Event page for upcoming events at Brookings.

SENATOR MURPHY: Great. Thanks, Professor Ray. Thanks, everybody.

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I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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