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For Immediate Release

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BOB MCDONNELL CONTENT TO LET FELONS, TERRORISTS, BUY FIREARMS AT GUN SHOWS

Arlington, VA—One week ago, in a debate between Virginia’s gubernatorial candidates, Bob McDonnell answered a question about the “Gun Show Loophole” by reiterating his support for unregulated firearm sales at gun shows in the Commonwealth. Citing improvements to Virginia’s mental health laws, McDonnell opined that the Virginia Tech tragedy had been adequately addressed, and bragged of the endorsement he received from the National Rifle Association.

In reality, Virginia legislators have taken no action to address the threat to public safety created by the Gun Show Loophole since the tragedy at Virginia Tech, despite the persistent pleas of victims and survivors of those shootings. The loophole allows individuals who are “not engaged in the business” of dealing firearms to sell guns at gun shows without conducting background checks on purchasers or maintaining records of sale. [The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives \(ATF\) has identified gun shows as the source of more than 30% of all illegally trafficked guns in the United States.](#)

At the state level, Virginia narrowly improved their Vcheck background check database following the April 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech. After it was revealed that killer Seung-Hui Cho had legally obtained handguns after being detained in a psychiatric facility, Governor Tim Kaine signed an executive order to require Virginia’s courts to forward Orders of Involuntary Commitment to the State Police so they can be considered during background checks by federally licensed firearm dealers (FFLs). This order was later codified in legislation.

Unfortunately, the Virginia General Assembly completely ignored a critical

recommendation of the Virginia Tech Review Panel to require background checks on private sales of firearms at gun shows. The panel recognized that a future Cho—or a convicted felon, domestic abuser, or other prohibited purchaser—could easily acquire guns through an unlicensed seller if they failed a background check through an FFL. As the panel wrote, [“In an age of widespread information technology, it should not be too difficult for anyone, including private sellers, to contact the Virginia Firearms Transaction Program for a background check that usually only takes minutes before transferring a firearm. The program already processes transactions made by \[federally licensed firearm\] dealers at gun shows.”](#)

Bob McDonnell’s repeated assertion that “the instant background check process has been greatly improved” ignores the fact that unlicensed firearm sellers have no obligation to conduct background checks, and in fact are prohibited under current law from doing so.

McDonnell has also chosen to ignore the voices of those who were directly affected by the Virginia Tech tragedy. In April, 50 survivors and family members of those killed or wounded in the shootings published an open letter in the Richmond Times–Dispatch in which they stated, [“We remain extremely disappointed in Virginia lawmakers for not closing the gun show loophole, and we hold them accountable for their inaction on gun violence prevention.”](#) That same month, ABC’s 20/20 program aired a [video](#) of Omar Samaha—the brother of Virginia Tech victim Reema Samaha—attending a gun show in Richmond and buying 10 guns in one hour without undergoing a background check. He never even had to show his driver’s license.

According to Bob McDonnell at the October 12 gubernatorial debate, this system of commerce “works well.” A [recent poll](#) by Christopher Newport University’s Judy Ford Wason Center for Public Policy indicates that eight out of ten Virginians disagree, and want the Gun Show Loophole closed.

“The only individuals benefitting from loose gun laws in the Commonwealth are criminals, terrorists, and other dangerous individuals,” said Virginians for Public Safety President Jim Sollo. “Bob McDonnell needs to decide what is more important to him: half a million dollars in [NRA PAC money](#) or the safety of Virginia residents.”

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Virginians for Public Safety (VPS) is a coalition of state residents promoting appropriate, meaningful ways to help police and public officials reduce crime and gang violence. We support tough public safety measures that keep guns

away from criminals, domestic abusers, and children; and we oppose vigilante efforts on the part of citizens that put our police and public safety at risk.

BRADY CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

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VAST MAJORITY OF VIRGINIANS SUPPORT CLOSING GUN SHOW LOOPHOLE, SAYS POLL

Washington, D.C. – A new poll says 80 percent of likely voters in Virginia support closing the gun show loophole. Virginians from across the states, of all ages, ethnicities, and political leanings support requiring background checks on all gun purchases at gun show. The survey was conducted October 8 –13 by Christopher Newport University, in conjunction with the Virginian–Pilot newspaper and WVEC–TV.

In Virginia, along with many other states, individuals are able to purchase firearms without a Brady background check from so-called ‘private sellers’ at gun shows. This means that convicted felons, domestic violence abusers, and those who are dangerously mentally ill can walk into gun shows and buy weapons from unlicensed sellers without being stopped, no questions asked. In the current gubernatorial race in Virginia, Democrat Creigh Deeds supports closing the gun show loophole, while Republican Bob McDonnell does not.

“This poll shows that while politicians still debate and delay, the public has concluded that closing the gun show loophole is a sensible and necessary step that will help keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people and make us all safer,” said Paul Helmke, President of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. “Virginia politicians should listen to their constituents and close the gun show loophole now.”

Helmke added: “Bob McDonnell is out of touch with what Virginians think about this issue. While an overwhelming majority of his fellow Virginians want to close the gun show loophole, McDonnell refuses to acknowledge that this gaping loophole in Virginia gun laws exists. Creigh Deeds agrees with the voters in Virginia, including the families of the victims of Virginia Tech, that

the most dangerous people, prohibited by law from purchasing guns from federally licensed gun dealers, shouldn't be able to get around those laws by buying them from non-licensed gun sellers at gun shows.”

To read more about the survey: <http://hamptonroads.com/2009/10/tighten-gun-rules-most-respondents-say-poll>.

As the nation's largest, non-partisan, grassroots organization leading the fight to prevent gun violence, the Brady Campaign, with its dedicated network of Million Mom March Chapters, works to enact and enforce sensible gun laws, regulations and public policies. The Brady Campaign is devoted to creating an America free from gun violence, where all Americans are safe at home, at school, at work, and in our communities.

Visit the Brady Campaign website at www.bradycampaign.org. For continuing insight and comment on the gun issue, read Paul Helmke's blog at www.bradycampaign.org/blog/.

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