

Speech by Maryland Governor Parris N. Glendening

Parris N. Glendening

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SPEECH BY MARYLAND GOVERNOR PARRIS N. GLENDENING
THURSDAY, MARCH 9, 2000

I commend the University of Maryland School of Law for hosting this important conference. Just today we have more reminders of why it is so critical that we act now to stop gun violence: A Baltimore County man involved in a domestic dispute, angered that his girlfriend had moved out, obtained a gun and has since killed four people. And in Memphis, Tennessee, a firefighter—for whatever reason—ambushed his fellow firefighters, killing at least two. This type of slaughter—which has become far too common—demands action on our part. It is my hope that this conference will help accelerate our response to this unacceptable situation.

I am especially pleased to see that your agenda today goes beyond the simple approach of addressing guns and gun violence as nothing more than a public safety issue. We all know that the ramifications of handgun violence impact the health of our citizens, the effectiveness of our schools, the revitalization of our communities, and the growth of our economy. Gun violence has a broad-based impact, and only a broad-based approach can counter these effects. This conference will help underscore that fact.

The need for a comprehensive approach to overcoming handgun violence is at the heart of Lt. Governor Kathleen Kennedy-Townsend and my agenda. First, we need to prevent handgun crimes from ever occurring. That is why we passed one of the nation's most progressive Anti-Gun Violence Laws in 1996.¹ We limited the purchase of handguns to one per month per individual; we required that all gun transfers be treated the same, prohibiting Straw Purchases; and we made it a felony to give or sell a handgun to a minor.

Second, we need to enforce our handgun laws. That is why we launched Operation Cease Fire.² This special State Police Unit has seized thousands of illegal firearms, including assault weapons. We also shut down numerous illegal handgun traffickers.

Third, we need to make guns safer. That is why we have introduced legislation this year that combines the need to focus on preven-

1. See Gun Violence Act of 1996, 1996 Md. Laws 561, 562. The Maryland Gun Violence Act limited gun sales to one per month, and eliminated "straw purchases." See *id.*

2. See MARYLAND CRIME CONTROL AND PREVENTION STRATEGY, CABINET COUNCIL ON CRIMINAL AND JUVENILE JUSTICE, MARYLAND CEASEFIRE: COMPREHENSIVE GUN ENFORCEMENT STRATEGY (March 2000).

tion, intervention and sanctions.³ For prevention, our bill requires that every new handgun sold in Maryland have features built into the gun making it child-proof or personalized so that only legitimate users can fire them. It also requires gun buyers to undergo safety training before purchasing a new handgun. For intervention our bill requires the meltdown of forfeited and seized handguns. It also requires ballistic fingerprinting of new handguns for future criminal investigations. And for sanctions, our bill requires a mandatory minimum incarceration of five years for felons who posses firearms. It also prohibits an individual incarcerated as a youth from purchasing a handgun until thirty years of age.

This is the right thing to do . . . and it is what the people of Maryland want! Members of the public—both gun owners and non-gun owners—are tired of seeing children killed. The public sees our common sense handgun safety measures for what they are: a way to stop accidental shootings, suicides, and murders committed with stolen guns . . . not a back-door attempt to ban handguns. The fact is that over 75% of Marylanders, including 60% of gun owners, support legislation requiring all handguns to be child-proof.⁴ And this support is strong in every region of the State.

It is amazing to me that as soon as Lt. Governor Townsend and I talked about the need to make handguns safer, the Gun Lobby immediately went to the media to push the idea that this was impossible. Just think about all the gun industry has done to increase the killing power of guns. They make guns that fire 600 bullets a minute. They make guns that can fire underwater. They make guns that are accurate to 1000 meters. They make armor piercing bullets. But ask them to make a handgun that a child cannot fire accidentally . . . then all of a sudden they lose the ability to innovate and call it Science Fiction. That is not just ridiculous, it is irresponsible!

And it is simply false. Here is an article from earlier this year: 'iGun firearm debuts at show.'⁵ I will quote from the article: "The brand-new iGun won't fire without the coordinating silver ring snug on the shooters finger. Promoters tout the iGun as the world's first personalized firearm."⁶ I guess the Maryland Gun Lobby needs to

3. See Responsible Gun Safety Act of 2000, 2000 Md. Laws 2.

4. See *Maryland Supports Childproof Handguns: Poll Results Follow National Trend*, MAHA NEWSWATCH (Marylanders Against Handgun Abuse, Baltimore, Md.) Winter/Spring, 2000, at 3.

5. See Carla Crowder, 'Smart' Guns Shot Show 2000 Debuts Weapons with Computer Decoders, Locks, Safety Devices, DENV. ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS, Jan. 23, 2000, at 7A.

6. *Id.*

spend less time trying to stop common-sense handgun safety laws and more time keeping up with the news.

But I guarantee you, when the gun lobby is forced to abandon the lie that this technology is impossible, they will turn to their other favorite lie: Gun laws do not do any good. Nonsense! Just look how effective our Gun Violence Law has been: In the first full year of this law's existence we saw an 80% drop in multiple handgun purchases,⁷ and guns from multiple sales are the most likely to end up in the hands of violent criminals. In the years following our passage of this common-sense handgun violence prevention law, we have seen a 28% drop in handgun-related violent crime.⁸ Clearly, this law is making a difference . . . it is saving lives!

With their two main arguments so clearly undermined . . . that child-proof handguns cannot be manufactured and, even if they could, that new gun laws do not make people safer . . . the gun lobby has actually started to put forth the argument that introducing this technology is not necessary because it could only save a few lives each year. That is outrageous. For an industry whose body-count is rivaled only by the tobacco industry to argue that it is not worth the effort and expense to save just a few lives a year is offensive!

Try telling the parents of this two-year-old boy who shot and killed himself with a handgun he found in a dresser drawer that preventing deaths like his is not worth this time and trouble. Try telling the family of this eleven-year-old girl who was shot and killed by her thirteen-year-old brother after he found a handgun while visiting their grandparents that it costs too much to design and manufacture child-proof handguns. Or try telling everyone whose life was touched by Kayla Rolland, the little six-year-old from Michigan who was shot and killed by a classmate,⁹ that you will spend millions of dollars to make guns more lethal, but have no interest in making them safer. Just as was the case with air bags or child-proof aspirin bottles, we know that the industry will not do what is right until we make them do what is right!

And we can make them do it. By working together we can make Maryland the national leader in the fight against gun violence. We must stand together and say no more! No more children accidentally shot to death after finding a gun in their home. No more emotionally troubled teenagers taking their own lives or unleashing their anger

7. See *supra* note 2 at 8.

8. See *id.* at 4.

9. See Peter Slevin & William Claiborne, *1st Grader Shoots Classmate to Death; Pair Had Quarreled the Previous Day*, WASH. POST, March 1, 2000, at A1.

with gunfire upon classmates, teachers, or others. And no more guns illegally obtained being used to kill innocent victims.

I will conclude with a final thought: There are over seven hundred gun deaths each year in Maryland, if you consider accidental shootings, homicides, and suicides.¹⁰ Think about it . . . if an epidemic or natural disaster had killed over 7,000 of our fellow Marylanders over the past decade, we would act quickly and decisively! We must act now to address the tragedy of handgun violence, or there will be more killings . . . and more victims. Today's conference is an important step. We must remember that the people of Maryland—and the people of America—want to see action taken to stop the spread of handgun violence. This is the right thing to do . . . for our children and for our future.

10. See J. JOSEPH CURRAN, JR., A FAREWELL TO ARMS; THE SOLUTION TO GUN VIOLENCE IN AMERICA 30 (1999).