



**Remarks by Dan Gross, President, Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence
March 27, 2012**

My name is Dan Gross. I am President of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. Thank you for inviting me to speak at this important briefing.

Our country must address the issue of hate crimes, of why one look at Trayvon Martin convinced George Zimmerman that Trayvon should be followed, and ultimately shot and killed.

We also must address the question of why George Zimmerman remains free and uncharged with any crime a month after Trayvon Martin's killing. Why he is, to this day, still allowed to carry a loaded, hidden handgun on our streets.

But I think the most important questions are "why is Trayvon Martin dead?" And "what are we going to do to prevent more tragedies like Trayvon's?"

George Zimmerman may be free because of a law that has been given the misleading name "Stand Your Ground;" but make no mistake, Trayvon Martin is dead because George Zimmerman had a gun.

Whatever happened between them that night, whatever George Zimmerman's motives were, it is beyond dispute that if Zimmerman did not have a gun with him, Trayvon Martin would be alive today.

And how did George Zimmerman come to be carrying that gun on that tragic night? The answer is clear - it is because of Florida's abysmal gun laws. George Zimmerman had an arrest record and a history of violence. Yet, in Florida he was able to carry a loaded, hidden gun in public.

The gun lobby considers Florida one of its great success stories — the realization of its vision of just about anyone being able to get a gun, carry it, and use it to kill.

In Florida, being armed in public is such a casual formality that law enforcement does not issue the license to carry loaded, concealed gun; that is done by the Department of Agriculture – the same agency charged with issuing permits to pick tomatoes or transport livestock. Their website is FreshFromFlorida.com. You can use it to get a permit to carry a loaded hidden gun without ever leaving your house. Providing your social security number is voluntary.

In Florida, law enforcement authorities don't have the discretion to take away licenses to carry concealed weapons – even from those who have killed unarmed people, which occurs with alarming regularity in states, like Florida, with "Stand Your Ground" or more aptly named "Shoot First, Ask Questions Later" laws.

Even after the South Florida Sun-Sentinel reported five years ago that over 1,400 felons had concealed carry permits, Florida did nothing to improve its system. In fact, the "Sunshine State" just shielded concealed carry records from public view, so we may never know how many more criminals have licenses to carry.

The NRA began its campaign to turn Florida into its armed utopia in 1987, succeeding in passing a law stripping law enforcement of any discretion about who may carry hidden, loaded guns in public.

It has worked to pass Florida's Shoot First Ask Questions Later law, and even a law banning doctors from warning patients about the long-proven risks of guns in the home -- a law which the Brady Center's lawyers have helped block in the courts.

The NRA promised that more guns would lead to less crime. They like to say that an "armed society is a polite society." Tell that to Trayvon Martin's family.

The results of Florida's relentless pandering to the NRA have been year after year of carnage. Since Florida enacted the NRA's concealed weapons law more than two decades ago, Florida has led the nation in violent crime – consistently ranking in the top five every year for states with the worst violent crime rates in America.

The shooting of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman is a heartbreaking tragedy. But it is not a surprise that it happened in Florida. This is what happens in the NRA's armed utopia. George Zimmerman is the embodiment of the gun lobby and its dark vision for America.

George Zimmerman is the NRA.

Now the NRA wants to export its Florida model nationwide. The NRA has made it clear that its vision is of an America like Florida, a nation where it's easy for dangerous people to get, carry, and use guns on our streets, parks, and playgrounds.

The gun lobby is working furiously right now on Capitol Hill to get Senate support for S. 2188 and 2213, what we call the '**George Zimmerman Armed Vigilante Act.**'

The Act, introduced only days after the Trayvon Martin tragedy, would force states to let Zimmerman, and thousands of other concealed carriers like him, carry loaded hidden handguns from Times Square to Topeka, from Maine to California. It would allow tens of thousands of concealed carry permit holders, such as those with violent backgrounds similar to Zimmerman's, to take their guns and their "shoot first, ask questions later" mentality just about anywhere they go.

If your state has sensible laws that might prevent someone like George Zimmerman from carrying a loaded hidden handgun, tough luck. This new bill would force your state to honor dangerous concealed carry laws of other states, even states like Florida, with abhorrently low standards.

If the NRA has its way in Congress, a George Zimmerman from just about anywhere in the country could get a Florida concealed carry license, over the internet, and walk your streets, armed and dangerous, and there is nothing you, your state, or your local law enforcement could do about it.

In fact, if this law existed already, George Zimmerman himself could travel to virtually any state and carry a loaded hidden gun – today!

It is time that the American people stand up and flatly reject the gun lobby's vision of America. It is time we replace it with our own vision of a nation where young people can go out to buy a pack of Skittles and a soft drink in safety.

As the citizens' lobby, as the voice of the overwhelming majority of Americans who support this vision, we will work tirelessly to bring that voice to bear – to hold accountable any politicians who put the agenda of the gun lobby ahead of the safety of the people they have been elected to represent.

We will force the gun lobby and the politicians who work against the agenda of the American people to face the real consequences of their actions – consequences like the death of Trayvon Martin and the thousands of others – black, latino, Asian, Native American, white -- that are lost needlessly in our nation every year.

Make no mistake, I blame George Zimmerman for taking the life of Trayvon Martin. But I also blame the gun lobby, Florida's reprehensible gun laws and the politicians that created them for allowing him to carry the gun he used to do it. In our pursuit of justice around this terrible tragedy, we have to consider what could have been done to prevent it and what can be done to prevent more tragedies like it – and we can begin by stopping the George Zimmerman Armed Vigilante Act.