

*This interview originally aired on CLTV's "Politics Tonight" on December 18, 2012. A transcript of the interview can be found below.*

Paul Lisnek: As the city of Newtown Connecticut continues to grieve the lives lost in last Friday's shooting, lawmakers start to take action to prevent this type of tragedy from ever happening again. Of courses, what is it that it takes to have that be the case? Joining me now, on the phone from Washington D.C., one of those in congress helping to push for gun control reform: U.S. representative, Mike Quigley from Illinois' fifth congressional district. Congressman Quigley, welcome back to "Politics Tonight."

Mike Quigley: Good evening. Thanks for having me.

Paul Lisnek: Alright, I've got a two part question for you. Part number one: my sense is the longer congress waits, the less likely anything is to pass. True or false? And number two, I think whatever has to happen has to be comprehensive: not just a gun control thing, but a mental health thing. And the fact that I think it should be comprehensive means it's even tougher to get it to pass quickly. It's a mouthful, but take it.

Mike Quigley: Well first of all, I think you're right on the first point, the moment is now. Unfortunately, as you know, people here are focused on two things: fiscal cliff and going home. That makes it very difficult to deal whit anything else on a meaningful basis. You know, there's talk about discharging some of the legislation that's out there, getting it on the floor. It's simply not going to happen. To your second point, I think people should go back and read what the justices wrote when they ruled on the Chicago gun case, when they allowed the second

amendment to stand. They said the right to bear arms is not a right to keep and carry any weapon, whatsoever, in any manner, whatsoever, and for whatever purpose. I think what they are getting to is, they understand the danger with assault weapons, military-type weapons particularly with large magazines. Most of these extraordinary tragedies involve thirty-round clips. And what I would suggest to people is: okay, you have a right now, established by the court and the second amendment to have a gun in your home to protect yourself, but no one can argue that they need an assault weapon with a thirty-round clip if they're protecting their home or hunting deer. The fact is, if you have that kind of weapon, with that kind of power, and you can fire, as the person did in Connecticut, over a hundred rounds in that short of a period, you're not hunting deer, you're hunting people. So, it at very least needs to deal with who can get a gun, and what kind of gun they can get. Let's remember what you're getting to here. When there's no background checks which exist in gun shows in thirty-three states, including Indiana, a person with multiple, violent felony records, adjudicated mentally ill, a chronic spouse abuser, someone on a terrorist watch list or a no-fly list, can go buy any gun they want. And people say, "oh that's impossible." Look! The GAO report said that 1,300 suspected terrorists purchased guns in this very way since 2004.

Paul Lisnek: Well, let me ask you this: this may be a bit of a – I think what happened in Connecticut is a game-changer. Something else may have been a game-changer today. I'm sure you are aware, the NRA issued a statement. They had been silent since Friday, but today they issued a statement. We read it earlier, but in part, essentially saying: "we've been quiet out of respect for what happened, and we are going to give money to organizations to try and ensure that this will never happen again." I don't ever remember the NRA taking a step like that before. Could it be that the NRA is ready, willing and able to talk with folks like you in Congress?

Mike Quigley: It would be very optimistic to think so because it simply hasn't happened yet. I think there's a difference between an NRA member and the leadership at the NRA. When they poll members at the NRA, the vast majority believe that everyone should have to go through a background check before they buy a gun. And I think the reason for that is they don't want the bad guys to have guns and endanger them and make them all look bad, because most gun owners are very responsible. The NRA leadership has never been supportive of that sort of thing on a legislative basis.

Paul Lisnek: There's a lot of calls saying, "Look, it's not just about gun control, but it's about mental health." We'll be talking about that a little later in the show. My question for you is: should mental health be a part of this discussion? Does it need to be?

Mike Quigley: It has to be part of the discussion. That's absolutely right. And the fact is that we don't adequately fund or handle the issue of mental health in this country. It is still an extraordinary stigma, as we have learned again in recent months. And there is so much more to do on that issue. And in addition, we also criminalize the mentally ill, and give them absolutely no other alternative. That's certainly part of the issue. It would be nearly impossible to make it part of the same legislation, but it has to be something that we do at the same time. Your callers are exactly right.

Paul Lisnek: With just a few moments left, I'm assuming this entire discussion for reformation starts with an assault weapons ban, the rebirth of what used to exist.

Mike Quigley: Yeah as the chief of police of Chicago said, "You can't do an assault weapons ban unless you also involve the large-volume magazines with thirty-round clips." Otherwise, it's useless. So, I think that's accurate. I don't think it's a reach to say at the same time that we have to keep guns away from people who would do us harm. I would say we can't solve all of those problems, but we would save a lot of people if we do.

Paul Lisnek: Congressman, we'll continue to talk about this issue as soon as you and your colleagues keep us from falling off of the fiscal cliff, which is your current problem and mission. But when you take care of that and come back on the show live in the studio, it'll be good to see you.

Mike Quigley: Glad to do it. Happy Holidays.

Paul Lisnek: And you as well. Democrat of the fifth district, thanks.

