

Jim Dean, Chair
Democracy for America
PO Box 1717
Burlington, VT 05402

Dear Mr. Dean:

We, the undersigned, all lead groups who have been deeply involved in the cause of gun safety for many years, and we were taken aback by DFA's recent press release arguing that Senator Bernie Sanders has a "strong record against gun violence." Apparently, DFA's Charles Chamberlain is unfamiliar with that record, because anyone who understands it and purports to be a progressive on this issue would conclude precisely the opposite.

Over the last four decades, there have been two monumentally important votes in Congress on gun safety, and Senator Sanders was wrong on both of them. First, in 1993, Congress passed the Brady Bill, which established the federal background check system for gun sales. That system has blocked more than 2.4 million gun sales to felons, domestic abusers, dangerously mentally ill individuals, and other prohibited buyers. Then-Representative Bernie Sanders voted against the Brady Bill.

Second, in 2005, Congress passed the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA), which granted special legal protection to the gun industry. This legislation gave gun dealers and manufacturers that supply criminals with guns legal immunity that no other industry has, even in cases where gun dealers and manufacturers negligently or recklessly supply criminals with firearms and make or sell guns without feasible, life-saving safety devices. By passing this bill, Congress denied many gun violence victims their day in court and created a profit incentive for gun companies to act irresponsibly and profit off the criminal gun market. Then-Rep. Sanders voted yes on this special interest legislation.

These are important issues upon which to judge the Senator's gun safety record. The Brady Law provided the architecture for all future gun safety laws, and PLCAA closed off the single most promising avenue of progress toward gun safety since the Brady Law went into effect. If the lawsuits had prevailed, experts recognized that litigation would have led to important improvements in the ways guns are made, distributed, and traced—and precipitated a dramatic decline in gun violence.

These were the decisions that have really mattered. There is no question Senator Sanders was on the wrong side of both votes.

Mr. Chamberlain's statement makes reference to the Senator's current NRA rating, but that shows a serious misunderstanding of how the NRA evaluates Members of Congress. Since Congress so rarely debates or votes on gun issues, candidate ratings are also based on votes on Supreme Court nominees, campaign finance rules, and a host of things unrelated directly to gun safety. Moreover, it is extremely difficult for a Democrat (or a Member aligned with Democrats) to receive a favorable rating from a group that increasingly has been interested in gaining and maintaining Republican majorities in Congress.

We trust that with this new understanding of the gun safety record of Senator Sanders, coming from people who have fought for the progressive position in this debate, your organization will retract its mistaken characterization.

Sincerely,

Dan Gross, President
Brady Campaign and Center to Prevent Gun Violence

Jonathan Cowan, President
Third Way

Peter Ambler, Founder and 501 (C)(4) Director
Americans for Responsible Solutions