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CBS News

FACE THE NATION

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GUESTS: SARAH BRADY
Gun Control Advocate

JIM BRADY
Gun Control Advocate

GREGG McCRARY
Former FBI Profiler

Senator PATRICK LEAHY (D-VT)
Chairman, Judiciary Committee

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FACE THE NATION - CBS NEWS
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BOB SCHIEFFER, host:

Today on FACE THE NATION, what next after Virginia Tech? It was the one question on America's mind: How could it have happened? Thirty-two people, most of them students, dead at the hands of a madman. And then the questions that come after. Where did he get the guns? What should've happened when students and faculty saw the first sign of a dangerously troubled mind? Will there be changes? We'll talk with Lawrence Hincker, one of the administrators at Virginia Tech; former FBI profiler Gregg McCrary; and gun control activists Jim and Sarah Brady. We'll ask Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy what to expect from Washington. Then I'll have some personal thoughts on all of this.

But first, Virginia Tech one week after the tragedy on FACE THE NATION.

Announcer: FACE THE NATION with CBS News chief Washington correspondent Bob Schieffer. And now, from CBS News in Washington, Bob Schieffer.

SCHIEFFER: And good morning again. Joining us now, Larry Hincker of Virginia Tech. He is the associate vice president of university relations. You have heard him speaking for the university throughout all of last week.

Mr. Hincker, we thank you for joining us this morning. First we, of course, extend our sympathies to you and everyone on the campus. I suppose it will be a long time before you can say things are back to normal, but how would you judge the state of the situation on campus this morning?

Mr. LARRY HINCKER (Associate Vice President University Relations, Virginia Tech): It's really actually pretty remarkable. You know, our campus was visited by just an unspeakable--unspeakable horror and tragedy, and yet--yet there's really a rebirth, to a large extent, that comes from this thing that we call Hokie spirit, and the outpouring of love from all around the country and the kind of spirit and, if you will, forgive me for this term, but just love for each other on this campus is--has really taken hold. And I think that we saw that in the memorials, the impromptu memorials on campus and, frankly, around the world. And so there is a sense that we are ready to go ahead and begin that rebirth, knowing, frankly, that we start it with endless grief and sorrow for all the many lost--lost souls.

SCHIEFFER: As you begin that rebirth, you have to reflect back on the fact that there were a lot of danger signs--signs that came up about this student. He read some of his poems, and other members in his classes refused to come to class with him. Professors reported that they were worried about him to both their higher-ups and to police officials on the campus. In light of that, have--have you decided that there'll have to be different procedures? Will you do anything differently when classes start tomorrow?

Mr. HINCKER: Well, when classes start tomorrow, first of all, there'll be a significant--has been and will continue to be a significant police presence on campus. I think the thing that we have to do is, is that, if we are not going to let this event define Virginia Tech, we are going to have to open ourselves up to the world, that my president, Charles Steger, asked the governor for an independent commission, and now President Bush is doing something similar. That if we're going to analyze and understand and hopefully get any kind of wisdom from this thing, we have to open ourselves up from the--to the world. And indeed, everything has to be on the table, whether it's emergency response, whether it's emergency communication, whether it's our internal protocols, whether it's the whole role of the mental health system, whether it's the inter-relationship between the mental health system and the purchase of guns. There's just a wealth of issues and processes that the world needs to look at with what happened at Virginia Tech so that this can never happen again.

SCHIEFFER: This morning on ABC, I believe it was, Newt Gingrich, a former Republican leader in the House of Representatives, he's now thinking about running for president, said that in states where people can legally carry concealed weapons, there have been instances where a killer was stopped. Do you think that would be one of the options, to bring guns onto the campus?

Mr. HINCKER: You know, I have--I have heard that. I've been personally criticized for some comments I had made that were reflecting the wishes of the faculty and the university administration. I would say to Mr. Gingrich, who himself sat in a classroom and to all the faculty in the world who stand in a classroom, I would ask them to answer that question, whether they would want to be in the front of a class knowing that one or more students would be carrying a pistol. That really isn't for me. I, you know, at the--the way that I am right now and feel right now and the deep emotions that I have, frankly, I don't think I could get a straight--give you a straight answer to that. But I would say that that really ought to come from the faculty, who have to face that kind of thing.

SCHIEFFER: When you talk about more police on campus, are you significantly increasing the number of police on campus?

Mr. HINCKER: You know, I really don't know what's taking place there. I know that everywhere I look there's state police, there are squad cars, there are Montgomery County sheriffs, there's police cars from local jurisdictions. And so, in my debrief, tomorrow I am certain that I will find out what level of presence that we will have on campus. But, to be perfectly honest, you haven't been able to walk 20 yards without seeing a trooper.

SCHIEFFER: Do you have any indication of how many kids are going to return? Do you expect everybody to be on campus tomorrow, or do you think there'll be a significant absence?

Mr. HINCKER: You know, we've been hearing that people are really aching to come back. Our university has given the students any option they want. If you want to come back, come back. If you want to take the grade you've got right now and go home, do that. If you want to take the grade you've got right now and come here and just be with us and share some love, do that, too. But the responses that we've heard--and, indeed, let me tell you a story. President Steger visited one of the wounded in the hospital just yesterday, and he's got a steel bar in his leg, and he said, 'President Steger, I'm going to be there on Tuesday.' So I think that there is this yearning to go ahead and start the rebuilding process.

SCHIEFFER: Mr. Hincker, I want to thank you very much for joining us this morning. And again, our feelings go out to you. We all feel for you. Thanks so much for being with us.

We want to broaden the discussion now by bringing in Gregg McCrary. He is a former FBI profiler. He studies situations like this.

And who can forget these pictures? This was back in 1981--March of 1981. This was the assassination attempt by John Hinckley on Ronald Reagan. One of the wounded that day was the president's press secretary Jim Brady. And since that day, Jim Brady and his wife, Sarah, who join us this morning from their home in Delaware, have been working for tighter controls on guns.

I want to thank both of you for joining us this morning. We want to get your reflections on this.

First I want to go to Mr. McCrary.

It seems, in retrospect--and you study these things--that a lot of danger signs, a lot of flags went up that this person was dangerous. What should have been done that wasn't?

Mr. GREGG McCRARY (Former FBI Profiler): Well, first of all, the--these risk markers or warning signs typically come up in retrospect, in hindsight, and we always have to be careful that we don't fall into the trap of hindsight bias, where, once we know the outcome of an event, everything before, it looks very, very ominous, and we look at it differently. So we have to be careful about that.

The issue, I think, is how do we assess that? Many times these risk markers, or these problem areas get stovepiped or compartmentalized. The students know something, a teacher knows something, maybe a mental health knows something else. Law enforcement or security knows yet something else. The way to best handle this is through a threat assessment team, or an interdisciplinary team that's put together. We've done it with businesses and corporations. Some schools have done it. Put together security and mental health and faculty and administrative people, and all of them may have a piece of the puzzle. But I don't know that anyone had all of the pieces, in this case, until after the--after the event itself.

SCHIEFFER: It sounds almost like the US intelligence situation after 9/11. We discovered the FBI knew one thing, the CIA knew something else, the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms people knew something else. What you're saying is bring in components of all those groups on campus, so they're all talking to one another.

Mr. McCRARY: Sure. And then stimulate reporting, so that everybody has some place to report that to and have confidence in those people that they're reporting it to that it will be handled correctly. And that's probably the best way to get some early intervention.

SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you, the--NBC released pictures of this man, he almost sent, like, a press release, a press kit to them. They released them. As a journalist, I believe they had an obligation to release at least some of those pictures, to help us understand the reality of this, the horror...

Mr. McCRARY: Mm-hmm.

SCHIEFFER: ...of exactly what was being confronted. I also believe that once the pictures are out, it's not necessary to keep showing them. We're not going to show them this morning.

Mr. McCRARY: Good.

SCHIEFFER: We think people remember what they look like and know all they need to know about that part of it. What was the impact of that?

Mr. McCRARY: I could tell you that if NBC had asked me what to do, my--I would differ with you to a certain degree. I would say report on the fact that those pictures and the videos had been provided and so forth, but not to release them. My fear is that that incites copycat, or you may engender or energize another would-be killer out there to do that. And it--that's the danger of doing this. And while the people need to know, certainly, it is a newsworthy item, we just have to be very, very careful. But there was wall-to-wall coverage of that for days, and that really, I think, was absolutely the wrong way to do it.

SCHIEFFER: Let me go to Jim and Sarah Brady. Both of you, of course, have been working to make it harder for people to get handguns, especially since this awful thing that happened to you, Jim.

Sarah, in the years since you've been working on this issue, do you find that you've had an impact? Do you think guns are more available now or less available than they were in those days?

Ms. SARAH BRADY (Chair, Brady Campaign): Well, let me tell you that we're not making--working to take handguns away from people, though what we do believe is that we need to curb the availability of these weapons to prohibited classes--felons, fugitives and, of course, in this case...

Mr. JIM BRADY: Wackos.

Ms. BRADY: ...those who have been adjudicated mentally ill. The Brady law, which was passed, required that a national instant check system be instituted, and it has stopped millions from purchasing handguns or long guns, as well, over--through gun dealers. What we had here, unfortunately, has come out in the last day or so, is that the system did break down. Although the national instant check system does a wonderful job with felons, with felony records and criminal records, they are only as good as what the states provide them, as far as mental health records, as far as misdemeanors involving spouse or child abuse. Virginia is one of 22 states that does provide the mental health--the group of people who fall into the mental health prohibited area. However, they did not follow the federal guidelines and instead had their own. And because of this, this young man fell through the cracks.

SCHIEFFER: Let me...

Ms. BRADY: I think it's something that they...

SCHIEFFER: I just--I just wanted to ask you, do you feel that what happened here, that we need to tighten the gun laws, or is this a case where we need to be concentrating on something else?

Ms. BRADY: Well, I think we need to go--to take a look and be sure that all our records are up to date, that the states provide the national instant check system with up-to-date, good records. So when someone goes in to purchase a gun, the instant check is actually able to catch young people or anyone like this who falls into this category.

SCHIEFFER: OK.

Ms. BRADY: Unfortunately, mental health records are not easily available on the national instant check system. So it's a matter of enforcing the existing law.

SCHIEFFER: OK.

And, Jim, before we go, let me ask you, how are you feeling these days and how is life treating you?

Mr. BRADY: Bob, I have good days, and I have bad days. Today is a good day.

SCHIEFFER: Well, it's great--it's great to talk to both of you. I want to thank you for coming. It is a reminder that when things like this happen, we see them in the headlines, but this is something that you two are dealing with and still dealing with it every day. Thank you so much for being with us.

Mr. McCrary, I want to go back to you.

Mr. McCRARY: Yeah.

SCHIEFFER: What about this statement that Newt Gingrich made this morning, that in some states where people are able to carry concealed weapons, that instances, killers like this have been stopped?

Mr. McCRARY: Well, there may--there may be instances where you could find that, but it reminds me of a statement by H.L. Mencken, who said for every complex problem, there's a solution that is clear, simple and wrong. And so we have to be careful that we don't oversimplify the problem or come up with a quick fix. And arming people--more guns, more gunfire is obviously potentially a problem. Certainly, police, and people who are trained to use these things, absolutely we need them, we need their presence there.

SCHIEFFER: Why are these people so hard to identify? I mean, we saw the danger signs here, and yet, people don't really want to believe, sometimes, I think, what they're seeing.

Mr. McCRARY: Sometimes it's denial. Other times you get into the individual traits themselves. If you're dealing with a paranoid individual, there's a pervasive mistrust of everyone, and they withdraw, and they don't tell you. Even when they're in counseling, they might not reveal their inner, darkest most secrets and fantasies and things, so it becomes very hard to really identify these people easily.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, thank you very much. Thanks to all of you.

We'll be back in a moment with the Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Pat Leahy, in a minute.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Joining us now, Senator Patrick Leahy.

Senator Leahy, I understand that two members of the judiciary committee have asked you to hold a hearing on guns.

Senator PATRICK LEAHY (Democrat, Vermont; Chairman, Judiciary Committee): Mm-hmm.

SCHIEFFER: What do you think's going to happen in the Congress as a result of this?

Sen. LEAHY: Well, I think we will have hearings, but I think we'll wait until at least Virginia comes back with their result. Governor Kaine is a well-respected governor, he's put together this commission, and even in some of the discussions we heard here in this earlier panel. And I apologize for the confusion on whether I should have been on the panel or not. I didn't realize how that was set up. We've had a lot going on this weekend, including a funeral in Vermont that I was at yesterday. But my...

SCHIEFFER: Do you think there are going to be any changes in the laws? Is this something that has to do gun laws, or does this have to do with something else?

Sen. LEAHY: But--well, to go back to--well, let me finish. I'd like to know exactly what happened. I think Governor Kaine's doing exactly the right thing.

SCHIEFFER: Mm-hmm.

Sen. LEAHY: Letting the families mourn the dead, let the school settle back down, and then go on and find out exactly what happened. Once we have that report, I intend very much to look at it. I intend to have our committee look at it. And that's one of the things that came out of this discussion. And I agree with Mrs. Brady talking about the question, who is allowed, under our laws--the current laws--to get guns. Why is it that somebody who has had psychological problems--at least according to the press reports and the shooter here--why were they able to buy a gun? Now, apparently in some states, the reporting would be such that, under our federal laws, they would not be allowed to buy a gun legally.

Other states are reporting it different. Do we need to ask for a greater uniformity among the states? Because I think everybody would agree that somebody with a psychological problem should not be allowed to purchase a weapon.

SCHIEFFER: But do you think that basically the debate over guns is over? Because a lot of people say that once Al Gore lost, that Democrats backed away from this issue and that they have not taken it up since. And I find it very interesting, the responses that we got after this. After 9/11, people said, "We want action. Do something." Almost to a person, the people have come forward, both on the Republican side and the Democratic side, and said, 'Well, this is a time for grieving. We'll think about what should be done later on.'

Sen. LEAHY: Well, I think it is a time for grieving. I think that it would have been shocking to see 50 people running out, including a lot of people who were very much in favor of gun control, and those against gun control, running out calling press conferences while all these scenes were going on. I even delayed the hearing with Attorney General Gonzales because I felt we should not distract the country from seeing what has happened, and allow the country to mourn together, which we did. What I would--you know, the president said in his first campaign that he was in favor of continuing the ban on assault weapons. They'd run polls that that was favorable. Of course, once he got in, he told the Republican leadership, 'Don't bring that--don't bring that thing up.'

SCHIEFFER: Mm-hmm.

Sen. LEAHY: And, of course, they didn't. They controlled the Congress. My concern is, on the laws we have, are they being enforced? Are the gun laws--for example, when I was a prosecutor, even though Vermont has virtually no gun laws, we do have a provision that if you use a weapon of any sort--a gun, a knife, or anything else--in a crime, there are additional penalties.

SCHIEFFER: Yeah.

Sen. LEAHY: I always asked for those additional penalties as a prosecutor. In this case, I think the thing that everybody should agree on--Republicans, Democrats or anybody else--is, if there are laws on the books that say a person with certain psychiatric problems should not be allowed to buy a gun--and there are such laws--how do we make sure that, when you're buying the gun, that that doesn't show up.

SCHIEFFER: All right, well let's--let's shift to the hearings with Attorney General Gonzales. A lot of people calling now for his resignation. Are you ready to call for his resignation?

Sen. LEAHY: You know, it's an interesting thing. A lot of those calls are coming from Republicans, and I think the Republicans were as critical as the Democrats during these--during these hearings. The question I have, if he left--I mean, he's lost--he's lost the confidence of many Democrats and Republicans in the--in the Congress, and many people throughout America. And the hearing did not help at all. It was--it was sad, in a way, because...

SCHIEFFER: Well, do you think he ought to stay?

Sen. LEAHY: But--but, well, in...

SCHIEFFER: Do you think Congress--can he be effective now?

Sen. LEAHY: I don't think he can be effective. But who would he be replaced with? If it's going to be another person who is going to be really run by the White House, and if the White House is continued to

be allowed to interfere with the criminal justice system throughout this country, some of the effects--everybody, right down to the officer on the beat, then it does no good. This is--never in the history, never in the history of the Department of Justice has there been a case where there's been so much interference from the White House in our criminal justice system. That is what's wrong.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Thank you, Senator, thank you.

Sen. LEAHY: Thank you.

SCHIEFFER: We'll be back with a final word in just a minute.

(Announcements)

Schieffer: Finally today, not since 9/11 can I remember a worse week than the one we've just experienced. The death toll in Iraq went even higher. Hundreds died as the government prepared to send more American troops into the war zone. Yet, I don't remember even a casual conversation about that, as the unimaginable tragedy unfolded at Virginia Tech. We talked of nothing else.

Reporters love to cover big stories, but there was no joy in the Washington bureau, which carried the biggest part of the load in covering the Virginia Tech horror. For our people, there was only revulsion and a sense of duty that such things must be covered.

It was what happened in the days and hours after the shooting that I found most depressing. In the wake of 9/11, people demanded action. This time it was different. This time public officials reacted with what seemed to be despair, even resignation. Despair that no one seems to know what to do, resignation that these things are going to happen from time to time as long as guns are available to the mentally deranged. And because powerful forces oppose tightening the gun laws, there is just not much that can be done about it.

This is an enormously complicated subject. There is no magic quick fix, including more gun laws. But Virginia Tech must have shown us one thing: The current safeguards are not working and, unless something changes, it is only a matter of time until what we saw or something worse happens again. The question that keeps running through my mind is, as a people, are we prepared to accept that?

That's it for us. We'll see you next week right here on FACE THE NATION.