

**Saturday, January 5, 2008
Northern Virginia Legislative Delegation
Fairfax County Government Center**

My name is Joe Samaha, father of Reema Samaha. I have been a citizen of Virginia for 52 years. Reema was killed at Virginia Tech in Norris Hall, Room 211, less than nine months ago.

I can tell you that 9 months seems like 9 days.

The massacre, unlike any in U.S. history, took place in Virginia, a state that boasts itself to be one of the best in the country in economic prestige; a state that boasts to be one of the best in the country in education; yet, a state that lags far behind the country when it comes to antiquated gun laws and mental health care.

The tragedy on April 16 could have been prevented. People, institutions and laws failed our children that day. If you have not yet read the Virginia Tech Panel Report, it is your duty to do so. If you have not read the critique of that Report, I urge you to do so. As you go to work in Richmond for ALL Virginia citizens on January 9, you must remember ALL of the failings; you must remember ALL of the reforms and recommendations; you must remember ALL of the loopholes that need to be closed. You must not divert away those issues that are not convenient or comfortable, namely the gun show loophole.

Unlicensed dealers should not be allowed to sell guns without background checks. This issue is not blue or red. This issue is not urban or rural. This issue is common sense and it is about public safety for all Virginia citizens. Closing some loopholes and leaving others open is not sensible and Virginians understand that.

THE ARGUMENTS:

The Cost:

However minute the statistic, if a law requiring background checks prevents one criminal or mentally disturbed individual from

acquiring a weapon, it is well worth the political cost. Otherwise, you can continue to calculate the cost to our state, Virginia Tech, our irreplaceable assets (our children and loved ones), the cost to your constituents and our votes.

Civil Rights:

You must consider the civil rights of all of your constituents when discussing background checks, not just a vocal minority that hype about more government control. Sensible and reasonable changes can only help protect everyone's civil rights. Rights that our children cannot enjoy any longer.

The *Nuisance* Factor:

I read where one blogger complained that closing the gun show loophole and having to go through a background check will be a *nuisance*.

-Let me tell you about the nuisance of hearing the reports on TV of the shootings at Virginia Tech on April 16.

-Let me tell you about the nuisance of calling Reema multiple times to check to see if she was safe and her not answering her cell phone. My heart pounding harder with each non-response.

-Let me tell you about the nuisance of speeding down I-81 with a knot in my stomach anticipating the worst fear any parent could endure.

-Let me tell you about the nuisance of a total stranger walking up to me at Virginia Tech informing me that Reema, "did not make it".

-Let me tell you about the nuisance of waiting four chaotic days for the identification and release of Reema's body.

-Let me tell you about the nuisance of the funeral arrangements; the viewing; the memorials; the burial.

-Let me tell you about the nuisance of our weekly visits to the “crying field” at National Memorial cemetery.

-Let me tell you about the nuisance of visits of family members, neighbors, friends, students and professors to their therapists. Left distraught and broken by this preventable tragedy.

-Let me tell you about the nuisance of our broken hearts and the ripple effect this event had throughout our community, state and nation.

Imagine that. This fellow was complaining about waiting a few minutes for a background check.

Let God and your heart be your guide.