

A year ago today, I stood before a crowd not far from here, as we rallied together to protest the lack of gun control in the United States. We were fresh off the Parkland Shooting, inspired by peers who had turned grief into action, and ready for a fight.

Today, a year on, our message is simple: We're still here, and we're not going anywhere.

The ultimate test of any social movement is time. How long can you stick around, pester your representatives, cause trouble for your opponents. How long can you keep shouting before the other guy has to pay attention. How long can you remain hopeful and impatient in the face of overwhelming odds.

And that is the test we face right now.

Today is April 20th, 2019. One year since the walkout. Twenty years since the Columbine school shooting. There should be a National event happening today. There should be people in the streets of New York and LA. Heck, we should have gun control already. It took New Zealand's government less than a month after the Christchurch attacks to put in place a ban on military-style firearms.

As we went through the process of organizing this event, I began to wonder: why it is that in a country where a majority of the population supports stricter gun laws, we can't even pass the most basic, common-sense gun laws? Why New Zealand was able to respond with such heroic efficiency, and America can't even seem to have an educated debate.

We all have a problem to address. We have to figure this out together.

And I've come to the conclusion that if we want to defeat the NRA, we have to learn from them. If we want to pose a serious threat, we have to be at fighting weight.

Part of it is money, yes. As of February of last year, only 6 Republican members of Congress had not received money from the NRA. And while the finance industry and the defense industry outspend them, being a single issue group, the only people the NRA has to outspend is their opponents, which is us, and they do.

But the NRA's success can't really be explained away simply with money. NRA donations account for only a small percentage of a candidates budget. They could do without it. So something else is going on.

What the NRA has is focus.

The NRA's only got around 5 million members in a country of some 300 million. But those members are incredibly animated. The NRA notifies them about local votes and they show up. They call Congresspeople, they write letters. Often, when gun control legislation is up for a vote, even if a majority of constituents support it, most of the calls come from people arguing against gun control.

And the reason that's the case is focus.

There are plenty of gun rights groups out there, but how many come up when guns are discussed? One. The NRA. There are hundreds of elections every year, but the NRA chooses its battles very carefully, targeting specific legislators and making examples out of them. There are

a million different ways to say we want gun control, but it's way easier for them to shout back "no."

With the wind of good marketing at their back, they have shaped an argument in favor of their position that somehow has to do with "protecting people's rights."

We may deplore the gun rights movement, but we know whose in charge of it. And we may deplore the NRA, but we know exactly what their position is every single time.

So where does that leave us?

How many gun rights groups come up when guns are discussed? I don't know. There's Everytown. There's Never Again MSD. There's March for Our Lives. There's Moms Demand Action. There's the Brady Campaign. There's Sandy Hook Promise. There's the countless other wonderful organizations in the room, each doing amazing work. Most of the time people just say "gun control advocates" or "gun control groups."

I love this movement, but I don't know whose in charge of it. And I love these groups, but I don't know all their positions.

Stricter background checks, one day waiting periods, ammunition control, an assault weapons ban--who knows what one group may choose to support at any given time?

We need an NRA.

We need to band together, move as a unit, and be relentless. The amazing work that KC Mothers in Charge does in this community cannot be matched. But the legislative focus of Moms Demand Action and Everytown is also imperative. We need to be one organization big enough to accommodate all those different kinds of work.

We need one list of goals. We need to make them known. We need to call our representatives. We need to remind people who think we're cranky teenagers that we don't just meet up once a year to say "gee I wish there was gun control."

We need to change the narrative. So when they're shouting that we're taking away their Second Amendment rights, we should be shouting back even louder and reminding America that we are fighting to protect an older and much more sacred right, and that is the right to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. That Americans are not truly free if they cannot pray in their synagogues and churches without fear, if they cannot go to the movies without fear, if they cannot send their kids to school without fear, if they cannot learn without fear. That we are not anti-rights; we're "For Life" or "Pro-Safety." Or something!

That if they are so concerned with the future of America, they should go back and read their history and understand that the right to sit at a lunch counter and the right to own a weapon that can level a movie theater cannot be equated. That other nations have successfully instituted gun control in the past and it has worked. That when the Second Amendment was written, the category of "arms" didn't include AK-47s. Assault weapons were built for the field of war! What kind of mass psychosis must go on to make us okay with having them in our homes? In our streets? In our schools?

So we need focus, and we need to rethink our protest. We need to rethink our branding. We need to rethink the way we communicate. Organize fundraising events, draw young people to the table by booking bands and musicians, raise money, target lawmakers who oppose gun control, spend them out of their seats. Think big. Think LiveAid.

Most importantly, we need to be unified. We need to not worry about which organization or what person did what. We must keep an eye on the prize.

The fight for gun control is the most important fight we face at this point in our history. It deserves a movement that can carry it through. Let's be that movement.

Our lives, and the lives of future generations of Americans, literally depend on it.