



THE SITUATION

A tragic accident occurred on the Arizona/Nevada border where a 9-year-old girl, learning to shoot an Uzi submachine gun at a roadside attraction, Bullets & Burgers, accidentally killed her gun instructor. The Lamber Goodnow law firm represented the children of the shooting victim, Charlie Vacca. Lamber Goodnow's charge to David Weissman* (PRBULLDOG): "We want to make new law! Get us in the media!"

BACKGROUND

Lamber Goodnow's personal injury attorneys, Marc Lamber and James Goodnow, are forceful, dynamic personalities who have come to trust PRBULLDOG. They wanted to appear on AC360 to talk with Anderson Cooper about legislation restricting automatic weapons in the hands of children. While Lamber and Goodnow have a history of changing the law in the interest of public service, here, they wanted to take on the Second Amendment in a very conservative state where no legislation about automatic weapons in the hands of kids exists.

After careful consideration, a full court press to drive new state law regulating weapons in the hands of kids was too broad and sensational, particularly as Arizona was on the tail end of an election cycle. PRBULLDOG prevailed upon Lamber Goodnow that the more prudent strategy was not to try and change the law, but rather to focus on the impact of the tragedy on this family while alluding to the kids' intention to become involved in the legislative discussion moving forward. Such a plan would allow the attorneys to formulate a legal/political strategy, while at the same time establish the kids and the attorneys as credible spokespeople.

Within days of the tragedy, Lamber and Goodnow arranged to meet with Charlie Vacca's kids, ages 11–19, and their mother in Las Vegas to film a video. They'd never met the children, and they didn't know what the video would be about or how they would use it. They asked PRBULLDOG to come to the meeting, define the message and determine how the video would be publicized.

STRATEGY/EXECUTION

The team didn't know what was going to happen when meeting the children as their father had just been fatally shot.

What PRBULLDOG knew from one earlier CNN story was that someday, Charlie's kids hoped to write a letter to the little girl shooter. There was no mention of what that letter would be about.

The next day, PRBULLDOG and the attorneys flew to Las Vegas to meet with the children and their mother. During an emotional three-hour meeting, it became clear that the kids wanted to forgive the little girl who killed their father. PRBULLDOG and the attorneys suggested the concept of a letter to the little girl shooter that would humanize Charlie while carrying a message of forgiveness. The kids embraced the concept of reaching out to the little girl through a video

letter crafted by PRBULLDOG and the attorneys with input from the kids. PRBULLDOG also crafted statements for the attorneys to deliver in the video and directed production of the video.

With the video in hand, PRBULLDOG's media objective was to help the children show the world that their father was more than "an instructor," and lay the foundation for an ongoing opportunity to shape the national debate about automatic weapons in the hands of children. To accomplish this, PRBULLDOG created a news release with the headline, "Victim's family writes a letter to 9-year-old girl Uzi shooter – Wants to meet her, hug her and tell her it's okay."

Next, PRBULLDOG exclusively approached Good Morning America (GMA) with an advance copy of the news release. The producers agreed to air the video in its entirety, including statements from the attorneys and original interviews with both attorneys. Moreover, for purposes of its web story, GMA agreed to allow the video to remain exclusively on the Lamber Goodnow website so that any visitors to the GMA site would be driven directly to the attorneys' website.

At the same time, PRBULLDOG negotiated a deal with Today.com to post the video and its story one hour following the GMA story broadcast at 7 a.m. PRBULLDOG also published a news release on PR Newswire nationally at the same time Today.com published its story. The timing created a firestorm of coverage.

RESULTS

To say that America's heart melted that day would be an understatement. News anchors became emotional as they marveled at how one family's children reached out to another child, forgiving her for killing their dad just weeks earlier. Social media lit up and was resoundingly supportive. The children were embraced by the nation as heroes for honoring their father and forgiving his killer. Originally produced stories aired on *GMA*, *AC360*, *CBS Evening News*, *Morning Joe* seen by 5,830,930 viewers; Lamber Goodnow's website traffic was up 6,000 percent from the month prior; PRBULLDOG's news release posted on 300 news organization websites across the country with a total potential audience of 22,841,000 viewers; original stories on 177 local TV stations in 50 states and local market viewership was 16,492,956 people.

THE STORY DOESN'T END THERE...

A year later, it was still legal for kids to possess and fire automatic weapons. While there had been attempts at such legislation in Arizona and Louisiana, those bills swiftly failed. As the one-year anniversary of Charlie's death approached, PRBULLDOG began planning for how we could reintroduce the Vacca children and their lawyers, back into the national discussion on gun control.

PRBULLDOG negotiated an opportunity with the *New York Times* for the lawyers to participate in a feature about whether kids should be allowed to shoot automatic weapons and how the Vacca kids felt about the lack of legislative change one year after their dad's death. That story was scheduled to come out on the one-year anniversary date of Charlie's death. To leverage the publication of the story in the *New York Times*, we PRBULLDOG and Lamber Goodnow created a new video from the Vacca children in the style of a public service announcement called "We Have a Voice". That video would come out the same day as the *New York Times* story. The message points in the video were: Most people don't know that its legal in for kids to handle and fire fully automatic weapons; the Vacca kids don't think they are alone in believing

that kids and Uzi's don't mix; nobody has asked kids across America what they think about this issue; the Vacca children are now asking other kids who can't yet vote, and their parents who can, to let state and federal legislators know kids and automatic weapons don't mix.

With these assets in place, PRBULLDOG began negotiating with CNN's *New Day* for exclusive first broadcast rights to air the video and speak with the Vacca children live about the We Have a Voice campaign. A lynchpin of the negotiations with CNN was that in addition to the broadcast story, PRBULLDOG insisted that *CNN.com* produce an online story publicizing the petition. The New York Times story came out as scheduled on the one-year anniversary date.

Three days later, CNN's *New Day* segment and the CNN.com companion story launched the Vacca children, and their attorneys Lamber and Goodnow, back into the national discussion about children being able to lawfully possess and fire automatic weapons like the one that killed Charlie Vacca. PRBULLDOG negotiated stories with the CBS Evening News and Inside Edition featuring the kids and their petition. So many people signed the online petition, it temporarily crashed the petition website.

THERE'S MORE...

With this new momentum, PRBULLDOG began discussions with the offices of U.S. Representative, Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) to advance the We Have a Voice initiative through federal legislation. Rep. Gallego and Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA) were already crafting joint legislation to prohibit children under the age of 16 from possessing machine guns or assault weapons anywhere at any time. Their plan was to have Sen. Markey introduce the legislation through a speech on the Senate floor. However, the date of that speech would have coincided with a key primary in California.

PRBULLDOG suggested to the Markey/Gallego legislative teams that a press conference at the U.S. Capitol including Sen. Markey, Rep. Gallego, the Vacca children and their attorneys would create a larger impact and increase the momentum behind their joint bill called the Help End Assault Rifle Tragedies (HEART) Act. The Markey/Gallego teams agreed with PRBULLDOG's strategy and that the Vacca kids and their attorneys could have speaking roles at the press conference. While the HEART Act ultimately did not pass during that legislative cycle, The Vacca children's voice resonated throughout and created a model for future legislation.

**David Weissman was employed by R&R Partners as Public Relations Director when these events occurred,*