

NRA Press Conference: Wayne LaPierre Calls For Armed Police Officers At Every School

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By PHILIP ELLIOTT, *The ASSOCIATED PRESS*

WASHINGTON -- The nation's largest gun-rights lobby is calling for armed police officers to be posted in every American school to stop the next killer "waiting in the wings."

The National Rifle Association broke its silence Friday on last week's shooting rampage at a Connecticut elementary school that left 26 children and staff dead.

The group's top lobbyist, Wayne LaPierre, said at a Washington news conference that, quote, "The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun."

The press conference comes one week after the mass shootings that killed 26 people at a Connecticut elementary school - 20 of them children. The group returned to the spotlight as Congress prepares to consider tighter restrictions on firearms in the new year.

The 4.3 million-member National Rifle Association largely disappeared from public debate after the shootings in Newtown, Conn., choosing atypical silence as a strategy as the nation sought answers after the rampage. The NRA took down its Facebook page and kept silent on Twitter.

Unlike its actions in the wake of other mass shootings, the group did not put out a statement of condolence for the victims while simultaneously defending the rights of gun owners.

That strategy, however, is set to change, starting with a news conference Friday.

In the lead-up, the group re-activated its Facebook account - it has 1.7 million members - and its Twitter feed now warns supporters that "President Obama supports gun control measures, including reinstating an assault weapons ban." The group also announced that its top lobbyist, Wayne LaPierre, planned to appear Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press" program.

It's an about-face from the group that ignored requests for comment and shunned media attention for four days following last week's shootings.

"The National Rifle Association of America is made up of 4 million moms and dads, sons and daughters and we were shocked, saddened and heartbroken by the news of the horrific and senseless murders in Newtown," the group said in its first public statement since the shootings, released Tuesday. "Out of respect for the families, and as a matter of common decency, we have given time for mourning, prayer and a full investigation of the facts before commenting."

The group also promised "meaningful contributions to help make sure this never happens again" and announced plans for Friday's news conference on what is, in reality, the last real work day before Washington scatters for the long Christmas holiday.

Since the slayings, President Barack Obama has demanded "real action, right now" against U.S. gun violence and called on the NRA to join the effort. Moving quickly after several congressional gun-rights supporters said they would consider new legislation to control firearms, the president said this week he wants proposals on reducing gun violence that he can take to Congress by January.

Obama has already asked Congress to reinstate an assault weapons ban that expired in 2004 and pass legislation that would end a provision that allows people to purchase firearms from private parties without a background check. Obama also has indicated that he wants Congress to pursue the possibility of limiting high-capacity magazines.
