Good morning special guests and CPAC attendees and all Americans who share in the hope and promise of our great nation, which we celebrate here today.

As CEO and Executive Vice President of the National Rifle Association, I have the privilege of directing one of the oldest and most successful advocacy groups in the world. At the NRA, we are dedicated to protecting your constitutional rights, promoting our most cherished values and carrying the torch for the freedoms that define the greatness of America.

The NRA has grown to almost five-and-a-half million members—the most in our history. And we represent the interests of an estimated 100 million gun owners.

Our members come from every walk of life. They represent people of every race, religion, gender, profession and political persuasion. And that diversity gives rise today to our plans for the future growth of the Association and inspires us to embrace a more inclusive vision of ourselves.

The NRA is 148 years old. An advocacy group built upon the strongest of foundations, the principles of our Founding Fathers.
Our nation was founded by people in pursuit of liberty. That’s why the Declaration of Independence is the first document of the U.S. legal code.

In their great wisdom, the fathers of this nation saw the need to protect our God-given liberties—fundamental freedoms—from being trampled by despots, dictators and demagogues, and from intrusion by the government they founded.

And so, they left us with a list of our most cherished freedoms—the Bill of Rights, the first 10 amendments to our Constitution. And in our First and Second Amendments, our founders gave us two freedoms that historically belonged ONLY to the upper class.

They gave us the freedom to speak freely, boldly and honestly. And they gave us the freedom to bear arms in defense of ourselves, our families and our nation.

When I started at the NRA more than 40 years ago, we certainly faced opposition. To be sure, we engaged in full contact advocacy with those who challenged our point of view and we debated issues of importance to our nation with all of our might.

As opponents in debates over important issues, the NRA often shared a seat at the table with those who opposed our values—even with those opposed to the Second Amendment freedoms for which we stand. The debates were tough. They were spirited. And they were defined by committed and unwavering voices.
Political differences aside, there was recognition that the NRA and advocacy groups of every kind are entitled to their voice in the discussion on matters that speak to our safety, security and ideals.

Boy, what a difference a couple of decades make! Today, we at the NRA awaken each morning to new challenges, to threats against our organization heated and vile, political rhetoric and new forms of opposition that violate the spirit and letter of the very freedoms our republic was founded to protect.

Today, many of our adversaries seek to challenge not only our opinions, but our very right to express them. Rather than compete in the marketplace of ideas, they want to rig the competition or foreclose it altogether.

Let me share an example. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo hates the NRA. He hates the freedoms for which we stand. And he's not shy about saying so. If you agree with our positions, the governor of New York says you have "no place"—that's a direct quote—"no place" in his state.

No matter how much he'd like to, New York's governor can't just expel gun owners from the state. He can't just ban the NRA. That would overtly violate the Constitution.

So instead, Governor Cuomo decided to covertly violate the Constitution by using his power over Wall Street to starve the NRA of funds. At the governor’s direction, New York's banking regulator sent letters to the CEOs of every bank and every insurance company doing business in the state.
The letters urged those institutions to blacklist Second Amendment groups, especially the NRA. To deny us bank accounts. To block NRA members from purchasing affinity insurance, including health insurance for their families. To prevent us from purchasing ads on the airwaves. To suffocate Second Amendment speech by choking off the funds that make speech possible. That's Governor Cuomo’s goal.

To achieve it, the governor didn't just threaten companies, he acted. New York started to punish companies that did business with the NRA. The state imposed multi-million-dollar penalties and forced several of our business partners to abandon us.

Let me say that again. The state imposed multi-million-dollar penalties and forced several of our business partners to abandon us.

Just imagine the national outcry if the governor of a red state did the same thing to Planned Parenthood, PETA or the Sierra Club. If a Republican governor forced businesses to blacklist those groups based on the viewpoint of their speech, the media would be going nuts.

Fleets of constitutional scholars would descend from every political persuasion. Every prestige newspaper would proclaim a grave threat to the First Amendment. And you know what? They'd be right.

Governor Cuomo would be wrong to try to censor Planned Parenthood, just like he's wrong to censor the NRA. It's morally wrong. It’s legally wrong. And that type of coercion and oppression of free speech is downright anti-American.
As Governor Cuomo would soon discover, attempting to silence the voices of our five-and-a-half million NRA members won’t be tolerated. In New York, the NRA did what patriots have always done in the face of tyranny. We fought back.

We took the governor to federal court under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. And in a great victory for principle over partisanship, the American Civil Liberties Union joined our cause. They stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the NRA and I'm incredibly proud to have them as a partner in this fight.

The court has already upheld the NRA's freedom-of-speech claims against Governor Cuomo. And let me tell you, I can't wait for our organization to get them in front of a jury. I believe that Americans still keep faith with the Constitution, even when politicians don't.

Against the backdrop of all this, the governor and his henchmen appear to have gone even a step further. New York's new attorney general—the chosen candidate of Governor Cuomo—vowed to attack the NRA as a pillar of her campaign platform.

Even before day one in office and without a shred of evidence that we've done anything wrong, the attorney general publicly labeled the NRA a "criminal enterprise" like MS-13 or the mafia. She promised a fishing expedition into the NRA's files, at taxpayer expense, to see if she could find any crimes to substantiate her slander.
In other words, she promised to fulfill a vision quest that is little more than a rank political vendetta. Contriving a criminal investigation to target a political opponent is the act of a third-world petty tyrant, not a distinguished public servant. And the America I know doesn’t tolerate such an abuse of power.

Here’s what’s going on. In real time, before your very eyes, we are fighting perhaps the most important piece of First Amendment constitutional advocacy in the history of our country. This case will decide whether or not government can be weaponized against you if your opinion differs from theirs.

True to this independent spirit, Americans have begun to notice Governor Cuomo’s attack on the First Amendment. And they don’t like what they see.

A Wall Street Journal columnist observes that the NRA getting its day in court is "welcome news for those helping to restrain the power of government." He commented that, "there is enormous interest for all Americans in making sure that a politician like Mr. Cuomo ... cannot abuse his authority to silence law-abiding citizens with whom he disagrees."

Closer to home for the governor, a columnist from the state capital of Albany wrote that the governor "has essentially weaponized the state's regulatory authorities" to go after the NRA, calling his conduct "tyrannical."

And political voices from the “right” and the “left?” From the National Review all the way to the New Republic have defended NRA’s free speech rights.
It is no surprise that the message from the courtroom is echoed in the court of public opinion. Our case is being discussed in law schools right now—it’s that critical to our fundamental right to speak.

Let me say it again. In our First and Second Amendments, our Founders gave us two freedoms that historically belonged only to the upper class. They gave us the freedom to speak freely, boldly and honestly. And they gave us the freedom to bear arms in defense of ourselves, our families and our liberty.

These rights are the cornerstone of our foundation as a free society. From the start, they made Americans different from the serfs and subjects of the old world. And centuries later, these rights continue to make America not just different, but better, than other countries.

For the NRA, freedom of speech is as essential as any other liberty. Because you can't advocate effectively for our Second Amendment freedoms without the right to speak out against its enemies.

No public official can weaponize the power of government to attack organizations simply because they have a different political point of view. Many believe that Barry Goldwater got it right when he said that extremism in the defense of liberty is no VICE.

But what we're seeing today is extremism that's hostile to liberty. These extremists want to revoke your freedom of speech, your freedom of assembly and your freedom of association if you hold views the elites don't like.
And leftist pundits aren't the only ones who feel this way. The oligarchs of Silicon Valley want progressive speech amplified and conservative speech suppressed.

A whistleblower at Google leaked a PowerPoint presentation last year titled, "The Good Censor." The document claims that Google—which is one of the world's most powerful monopolies—has "shifted away" from the "American tradition" of free speech.

It says Google shifted toward the quote "European tradition" of censorship. And wouldn't you know it, in the European tradition, Google began to censor firearms instructional videos this year.

Just like the Second Amendment, the First Amendment must be defended absolutely, against all incursions, without compromise. And just like the Second Amendment, we should aim to exercise our First Amendment rights responsibly. Not by censoring others, but by lifting up our own voices. By speaking out with dignity, purpose and courage in a way that honors the founders' gift to us. More, better speech—that's the way to fix America.

George Washington said, "If the freedom of speech is taken away, then dumb and silent we may be led like sheep to the slaughter." My friends, rest assured, the NRA will never let that happen.

There is a great saying: adversity doesn't build character, it reveals it. I can tell you that in times like this, the character and identity of the NRA will reveal itself in the most visible of ways.

We will fight back against anyone who attempts to silence us. Understand this, we will advocate, as loudly and boldly as ever, for our First and Second Amendment freedoms.
My call today is for each one of us to embrace and respect the constitutional freedoms that are afforded to all of us. This is our moment of truth.

To our members, I thank you for standing with us and holding tightly to the freedoms for which we stand. To those of you just learning of our cause, I invite you to become part of the future of the NRA, inspired by the constant belief in the spirit of America.

Come join the NRA—the unabashed, unapologetic fighter for the freedoms that have always made America the greatest nation on earth. America, the home of the free and the land of the brave.

God Bless all of you and God bless the United States of America.