

me crazy," NRA Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre said.

But what if the gunman, Adam Lanza, had been confronted by a trained security guard?

"Will you at least admit it's possible that 26 innocent lives might have been spared?" LaPierre asked.

"The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun," he said.

LaPierre's position sets the stage for a contentious battle between the NRA, one of the most powerful lobbying groups in Washington, and the Obama administration, which has promised quick action on "real reforms" to gun laws.

This week, President Barack Obama tapped Vice President Joe Biden to lead a task force to start formulating those reforms and, with the White House's support, Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-California, said she will introduce legislation to reinstate the assault weapons ban that expired in 2004.

Gun owners fear new legislation could tread on their rights

The NRA had remained silent in the wake of last week's school massacre as the debate on gun control was shaped by these moves in Washington. That changed Friday when it drew a line in the sand, providing its alternative vision for protecting American children through armed security personnel at all schools.

"Why is the idea of a gun good when it's used to protect the president of our country or our police, but bad when it's used to protect our children in our schools?" LaPierre asked.

"We need to have every single school in America immediately deploy a protection program proven to work -- and by that I mean armed security," he said, reading from a prepared statement.

The NRA executive appeared aware that he was staking a bold position in front of a divided public that recent polls suggest is leaning toward tightening gun laws. In case he wasn't, protesters interrupted his address twice, shouting anti-NRA slogans and bearing banners in front of his podium, including one that said "NRA killing our kids."

LaPierre spoke exactly one week after the deadly shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut. Across the nation, church bells rang in remembrance of the victims. The NRA was among those groups that observed a moment of silence at 9:30 a.m., the same time as last week's massacre.

Residents in Newtown and across the country paused for a moment of silence in memory of the victims. Many websites went dark momentarily to mark the moment.

Funerals for five of the victims -- school psychologist Mary Sherlach, behavioral therapist Rachel Marie D'Avino and students Grace Audrey McDonnell, Olivia Rose Engel and Dylan Christopher Jack Hockley -- also took place Friday.

A slight majority of Americans favor major restrictions on guns: 52%,

up 5 points from a survey taken in August after the July shooting inside a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, where 12 people died, according to a CNN/ORC International poll released Wednesday.

More than 195,000 people have signed an online White House petition supporting new gun control legislation.

Yet the NRA has support among many Americans who believe that taking steps to limit access to guns is not the answer.

One CNN reader summed up the pro-gun argument this way: "We ... put undercover, plain clothed air marshals on our planes to protect us when we fly. I fully support the same in our schools to protect my children. Every school should have one," Ali wrote.

"A cop in every school is a much better solution than a holster on every teacher's belt. But it doesn't go far enough. This is an attempt to contain the problem to schools and avoid the broader discussion," another CNN commenter wrote.

Parents defend right to keep guns in the home

Others pointed to the apparent contradiction among conservatives who want to reduce public spending but also support the NRA's idea to arm schools. Who will pay for the thousands of armed guards? several CNN readers asked.

Many suggested taxes on guns that could fund such a program.

Why own a military-style rifle

The NRA envisions a "National School Shield Emergency Response Program" where qualified police, military, security personnel and others organize to protect schools.

Schools remain a target for criminal gunmen because they are not protected by armed security the way other important institutions are, LaPierre said.

Policies banning guns at schools create a place that "insane killers" consider "the safest place to inflict maximum mayhem with minimum risk," he said.

Former congressman Asa Hutchinson will lead the school security project.

Armed personnel will be part of the security model but not the only component, Hutchinson said.

"School safety is a complex issue with no simple, single solution," he said. "But I believe trained, qualified, armed security is one key component among many that can provide the first line of deterrence as well as the last line of defense."

NRA power and money go a long way in states

The NRA, with its roughly 4.3 million members, is the standard bearer for protecting the Second Amendment. It is also the source of hefty campaign donations.

During the 2012 election cycle, the NRA donated \$719,596 to candidates. Republicans received \$634,146 of that, according to the Center for Responsive Politics' analysis of federal campaign data.