

Kirk says she still supports gun rights

Husband’s killing doesn’t change her values

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PHOENIX – Erika Kirk still supports the constitutional right to bear arms even after her husband, the conservative activist Charlie Kirk, was assassinated.

The nation’s struggle with political violence is much deeper than gun rights, Erika Kirk said on Dec. 3 during an interview at the New York Times DealBook Summit in New York City.

“I wouldn’t wish upon anyone what I have been through, and I support the Second Amendment as well, I do. But there’s a bigger and much deeper conversation to all of that,” Erika Kirk said.

Charlie Kirk, 31, the architect of the Arizona-based conservative behemoth Turning Point USA, was a staunch defender of the Second Amendment during his life. After he was shot and killed on Sept. 10, his past comments that some gun deaths were worth enduring to protect gun rights went viral online.

Interviewer Andrew Ross Sorkin asked Erika Kirk if she shared her late husband’s view on guns after his death. After stating her support for the Second Amendment, Kirk pointed to mental health challenges among young people, such as anxiety and depression.

“What Charlie knew, and he was trying to explain to students on campus, was that you, you have to understand that brain health is so important. How you eat, how you take care of yourself, how you nourish yourself, how you rest,” Erika Kirk said. “To him, it was much more, deeper and intricate.”

Charlie Kirk was killed Sept. 10 at a Turning Point event on the Utah Valley University campus. Tyler Robinson, 22, was charged with his murder.

Erika Kirk took over her husband’s political organization as the Turning Point chair and CEO.

“What I’ve realized through all of this is that you can have individuals that will always resort to violence. And what I’m afraid of is that we are living in a day and



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DAVID DEE DELGADO/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES FILE

age where they think violence is the solution to them not wanting to hear a different point of view,” Erika Kirk said. “That’s not a gun problem. That’s, that’s a human, deeply human problem. That is a soul problem.”

Before he died, Charlie Kirk had been slated to appear at the DealBook Summit, Sorkin said. The pair had begun talking and debating issues.

During their 38-minute interview, Erika Kirk addressed her late husband’s political beliefs, her view of fractures in the GOP and her organization’s intent to support Vice President JD Vance in the 2028 presidential race.

She called Charlie Kirk a “peacemaker” because he was known for engaging with people he disagreed with.

She also pointed to Kirk’s public memorial in Glendale, Arizona, where President Donald Trump and ex-Trump adviser and billionaire Elon Musk set aside their feud to honor him. Charlie Kirk had prayed that Trump and Musk would become friends again, Erika Kirk said.

“He was so sad when Elon and Presi-

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dent Trump weren’t friends,” she said. “Unfortunately it took him being murdered. But I’ll never forget seeing the photo of Elon and the president shaking hands, and Elon, them putting on X, ‘For Charlie.’”

Sorkin pointed out that Charlie Kirk was also known as being a “disruptor.” He asked Erika Kirk whether she agrees with her late husband’s controversial comment that the Civil Rights Act was a “mistake.”

“A lot of people took things that my

husband said out of context. When you listen fully, and you understand fully where he was coming from, that disagreement in our country is what democracy is all about. My husband, just because he would make certain statements, did not mean that he was trying to rile up a certain part of people,” Erika Kirk said. “He was trying to, again, go after ideas, not people. He was trying to get people to think a little bit differently.”

Erika Kirk encouraged political discourse later in the interview when she addressed fractures on the right, which she said have grown deeper after Charlie Kirk died. She did not name any specific person.

“There is a lot of uprising,” Erika Kirk said. “I truly believe that the Lord uses everything. And so for me, what I see that as, is opportunity for really getting back to the basics of what our party stands for.”

Erika Kirk also addressed the vitriol she’s faced online, noting she’s taken social media and news apps off her phone. She has someone else post and siphon through comments on her behalf.

“I get called so many names. I genuinely don’t care. I really don’t. I told you this before, when you kiss the bloody dead body of the person that you love, it pales in comparison to being called X-Y-Z,” Erika Kirk said.

Erika Kirk also reiterated her support for Vance if he runs for president in 2028, but she said she’s focusing on enjoying Trump’s 2024 victory and second term.

Charlie Kirk supported Vance when he ran for Senate in Ohio in 2022 and encouraged Trump to choose him as his running mate last year. Turning Point was credited with boosting turnout for Trump and Vance in the 2024 presidential election.

“We adore JD, and my husband was very vocal about endorsing him,” Erika Kirk said. “But I do have to preface this from the standpoint of we have a tendency, as humans, to look past. ... I think it would behoove us to appreciate that hard work and enjoy the fact that we do have a president in office that we voted for.”

Penny presses aren’t going away

Despite coin’s retirement, popular machines to stay

Kate Perez
USA TODAY

Robert Hoff was amazed the first time he saw a coin press machine in action in the 1970s. Hoff was in his twenties when a person passed him while carrying the machine and watched as they pressed pennies for a quarter a piece.

That moment created a lifelong collecting hobby for Hoff and his family, shared by people around the country and the world who love to feed their pennies into a slot, choose a unique design that mirrors whatever attraction they are at, and crank an arm around and around until a flattened, bronze coin is spit out.

It is a pastime that could be impacted by the U.S. government decision to stop producing pennies. The U.S. Mint stopped making the coin after President Donald Trump ordered the Treasury Department in February to stop minting the one-cent coin because it costs more to mint than it’s worth. Each penny costs 3.69 cents to make, according to the U.S. Mint’s annual report.

The end of production leaves an air of uncertainty for the penny and its future, including how it is spent by customers. Despite some stores already seeing shortages in the penny, coin collectors and penny press machine manufacturers alike both say there’s no need to worry about the nostalgic souvenir activity disappearing.

“There are millions of machines around the world,” Hoff, who now runs an online penny press community website, told USA TODAY. “They’re very popular in other countries and all parts of the country. Here, some of them run on pennies, but there’s also a coin press machines that press nickels, dimes, quarters.”

Brian Peters and his father, Joe, have run The Penny Press Machine Company in Minnesota for almost eight years, and both share a similar sentiment to Hoff. There are alternative methods to keep the hobby alive, they say, and some are



“You didn’t just buy something in the store. You actually made it,” says Brian Peters of the allure of pressed penny souvenirs. Peters and his father Joe Peters own penny press machines in Chicago. PROVIDED BY BRIAN PETERS

already in use in the United States within their machines.

Some of the most popular alternative methods include using other types of coins for pressings, including nickels and dimes. The company also has machines that come stocked with copper “tokens” that are stored inside the press, are distributed when the customer pays, and act as the penny during a pressing, Brian Peters said. This can be used when a customer has no coins at all, as well.

“In this next 20-year time frame here when there’s still a lot of pennies out there that people have, but maybe some people don’t have one and they can’t go to the (cash) register and get one, they can pay with the credit card,” Brian Peters said. “The machine will supply the penny or the token, or they can still use their own on that vending feeder. So, we’re giving them both options.”

These methods are also at play already internationally. Alan Fleming, owner of international company Penny Press Factory, said the coins in his machines vary from country to country, including brass coins in Dubai. While Fleming has heard some concerns from customers about the machine’s futures,

“I kind of like the idea that people are going to decide, hey, I don’t really need to spend this penny, but I’m going to save it and make it into a lifelong lasting souvenir with a penny press.”

Brian Peters
The Penny Press Machine Company

he also does not foresee the attraction diminishing, especially with the alternate coins and electronic payment methods available.

While he is not worried, Fleming added that the antiquated nature of the penny press could play a role if it were to diminish in popularity. It’s a very “analog thing in a very digital world,” he said, but that also is what keeps it interesting to customers.

“I think that the appeal is either because its retro, in a sense the same way

that perhaps a photo booth is retro or interesting,” Fleming said. “The other thing, and this perhaps points to the lifespan of the penny press, is I think millennial parents will sort of point to them and say, ‘Oh I used one of them when I was a kid.’”

What makes penny presses special?

For coin collector Hoff, the appeal of the elongated coin remains the nostalgia of making a souvenir you get to take home, he said. While switching to alternative methods might change the process slightly for the consumer or collector, the feelings the coins create will remain, he added.

“If you watch people waiting in line to press a penny, you oftentimes see a lot of laughter, smiles, and generally that’s something they want to take home and they’ll have for a while,” Hoff said. “It’s a fun family thing. It’s wholesome and it’s interesting. It introduces family members to places and venues, and it’s inexpensive.”

For the Peters, coin pressing is truly a family affair. Beyond the business, an interest in elongated coins has been shared through generations. That can be passed down for any family and keeps the allure alive, Joe Peters said.

From Brian Peters’ perspective, the action of pressing the coin is what makes it so unique.

“It’s more than just a souvenir,” he said, an idea also echoed by Fleming and his machines in Europe and other locations.

“You didn’t just buy something in the store. You actually made it. So, you have an ownership of it. You have a memory with it. And it’s the memory of that visit,” Fleming said.

Even if people do decide to be choosy with what they do with their coins, Brian Peters is still hopeful for the future.

“As the coins are being used less, I kind of like the idea that people are going to decide, hey, I don’t really need to spend this penny, but I’m going to save it and make it into a lifelong lasting souvenir with a penny press,” Brian Peters said. “I think could be a great kind of end use for all these pennies.”