

Stephen Gutowski (00:03.658)

All right. Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to another episode of the weekly reload podcast. I'm your host, Stephen Gutowski. I'm also a CNN contributor and the founder of the reload.com where you can head over and sign up for our free newsletter today. If you want to keep up to date with what's going on with guns in America, send out our free newsletter once a week. So low, low commitment thing. We don't flood your inbox. And of course, if you want to support our reporting, keep us independent. You can buy a membership.

today as well to help us continue our work here. You'll get exclusive access to hundreds of pieces of analysis that you won't find anywhere else. This week we are talking with an activist up in Hartford, Connecticut about plans about walks that he'd been doing recently. We have Cornell Lewis, who's the founder of the Self Defense Brigade with us. Welcome to the show, Cornell, thank you for joining us.

Cornell Lewis (00:56.846)

Thank you very much for having me.

Stephen Gutowski (00:58.738)

Yeah, absolutely. Can you just give us a little bit of background on the self-defense brigade exactly what it is for people who might not have heard of heard of you yet?

Cornell Lewis (01:07.73)

In Hartford, I organized a self-defense brigade in order to help people in the community with certain issues. For the last five years or so, we provided hand-to-hand combat training and strategies and legal armed security for Black Lives Matter protesters.

In Connecticut, we have a contingent of neo-Nazis and other types of people that threatened us occasionally. So I helped the people to form security brigades so that when they went out, they were disciplined, they were legally armed, and they knew how to fight. And so that is what we did. And we trained people every week or two in various places.

including the LGBT community and included them in the security forces.

Stephen Gutowski (02:14.043)

Okay, so this is something that started back around 2020, you know, Black Lives Matter.

Cornell Lewis (02:18.474)

It has been going on longer than that but for a while we did it on the down low. We trained people all over Connecticut. So the first thing we did was to teach people the principles of hand-to-hand combat. I'm a fourth degree black belt and I fought in martial arts competitions for 10 years. And so I taught people how to fight Muay Thai style.

I showed people my specialty, which was Brazilian jiu-jitsu grappling. And then I taught people what my teachers taught me, many of whom were green berets, how to fight in close. And then we talked. I taught them strategy about going out, knowing how to get into a location, how to get out of a location where the exits were.

how to have extra cars around when you get ready to get out in case it got hectic and things of that nature.

Stephen Gutowski (03:26.494)

Okay. And since that time, when you were doing more Black Lives Matter focused stuff, it seems like you've branched out into community violence prevention, essentially with these latest marches that you've done over the last year or two in Hartford. I know there was just one recently that's gotten some news attention where you went with a group of activists and walked the streets in some of the neighborhoods that had issues with violence and even murder.

recently is that can you tell us a little bit about that aspect?

Cornell Lewis (03:59.114)

Well, the people in Hartford, in the north end of Hartford, that is basically a Black, Brown, Latino, Latina, and African community. And the people feel as if they are not getting the proper resources from the political machine, which is basically a democratic machine. And so people, um,

know of the Self Defense Brigade, they know of them, they know me, and they know that we've been working tirelessly in the community for a while. So they contacted me to help them form strategies so that they could patrol their community armed and unarmed and how to get rid of negative elements in the community because

Around 1993 or 94, they watched me and some other men and women go from block to block in the north end of Hartford and shut down the gangs and get rid of the drugs and the crime. And it wasn't pretty. We did things that the police couldn't do. But people remember it was successful.

and we shut down large areas of Hartford where there was drug dealing and other criminal activity going on. So the people contacted us and asked to have something in place that they could use. So I proposed legal armed security patrols and that is what we're

doing now. People go out, they patrol, they're in a group, they're disciplined, and they do what they feel is necessary because at this point in time they don't seem to be getting any relief from the politicians or the other people like the NAACP.

Cornell Lewis (06:23.414)

and some other anti-violence groups that claim to be speaking for the people.

Stephen Gutowski (06:29.426)

All right. So walk us through a little bit of what these, these marches, these patrols look like you said, you know, you do stuff that police can do. What, what do you, what, what does that mean? Whether it was it.

Cornell Lewis (06:35.506)

Okay, they look, well they look like this. You get a number of people together like we did Saturday. Many of them were already trained with me and have been with me three, four years. So I was really speaking to the new people. So what we do is we explain what we want when we go out and patrol. We don't want any wild, wild west acts. We don't want people pulling their guns.

unnecessarily. We try to defuse all potential problems, but if we are attacked, we will defend ourselves and the only person given the order is me. And if I think we're going to be hurt, then I will give the order. Other than that, we go out disciplined. We have people taking the front, the point. We have people bringing up the rear.

We have people on the east and on the west. And in the environment, 30, 40 yards from us, we have men and women in automobiles that only I know of where they are. And they have long guns, shotguns, AR-15s. And if I give the signal, that's the cleanup crew. They come in, and they cut off any potential

enemies that we might have. And so that's basically how we do it. We go out, we're disciplined, we in formation. And Saturday I had a whistle. And I told the people, if you hear the whistle, fall back to the church. We had a rear guard that makes sure that if our enemies are in front, that the people in the back can get to the church. And we had the rest of the arm.

people ready to escort the people back to the church. The rear guard, we are expendable. Our job is to make sure everybody gets back safely. And so that's what I explained to the people. They said, okay, and then we left the church. We had a hundred people in the church learning about legal armed carrying, what's needed to get a license.

Cornell Lewis (08:58.954)

We had 30 people out there marching with us. Half of those people were legally armed with more than one gun.

Stephen Gutowski (09:08.91)

Hmm. Well, yeah, I mean, that's obviously, uh, you know, pretty, um, pretty drastic action you're, you're having to take here. Uh, you, and you have like, I think you alluded to earlier received criticism from the mayor and from, uh, some gun control groups or, uh, there's a group called, uh, moms united against violence. That's criticized these, uh, these marches that you're doing. Uh, why do you feel compelled to

undertake this sort of action? Why not, you know, go unarmed or have a community watch, neighborhood watch, like more traditional style? What is it that you think is, you know, making this necessary?

Cornell Lewis (09:46.41)

Well, if the Second Amendment allows us to carry legal weapons, why can't we do that? So when people say, why do you have to be armed? I say, why not? We're legal, we're under control, we've been doing this for a while. And you know, it's interesting, nobody said anything when we were out.

in the suburbs marching and they knew we were legally armed and the neo-Nazis were calling us names and saying things and the proud boys showed up at one rally and I said if you threaten us or attack us we're going to defend ourselves. That was in the front, on the front page of the Hartford Courant. Saw me shaking hands with one of the proud boys and I said if you attack us we're going to defend ourselves. I said capiche?

And the guy said, Capiche. But now there was no hue and cry about that. But as soon as we come back to the city and we implement the same thing, now there's a hue and a cry. So I say this. Why not carry weapons? Why not be able to defend ourselves? The Democrats, the democratic machine in Hartford is more worried.

about us carrying guns and as the mayor said, Cornell and those other people invited a Republican, exact words in the CT insider newspaper, a Republican, a conservative.

to come and address the people about gun control. Well, this man that they're talking about, Attorney Craig Fishbein, used to be the head of the firearms review board. He's a state senator. He's an accomplished lawyer. So who better to talk about guns and safety and what you need to do than the man who used to be the head of the firearms review board. But see, they're concerned about those things. So...

Cornell Lewis (12:03.338)

Some people may see it as being drastic, but I don't. The oppressed, historically, all over the world, choose their method of fighting oppression. As my Irish brothers tell me that are with us, you can't start a fight mind and then tell me how to finish it. And so we say the same thing. You know, we have the right to...

dictate and organize what it is that we want to do in terms of freeing ourselves from oppression. Sophocles wrote this, heaven will never help a man who will not help himself. And we're helping ourselves using the limited resources that we have. And so we think this is

Cornell Lewis (13:02.798)

thrown at us don't seem to work. The politicians are talking, they're not doing anything, and the people are tired of it.

Stephen Gutowski (13:14.85)

Hmm. And, uh, you know, I haven't read it. I've read a number of news reports. Obviously as much as didn't just start happening this month, you've done them in the past as well. There's reports on them from last year. Have you had any run-ins with law enforcement? Has there been anyone who's from your group that's gotten in trouble over this?

Cornell Lewis (13:33.594)

Last year, we had a similar march on Barber Street, starting at a place called Unity Plaza, a scene of crime and shootings. The police showed up there.

And before the march, they said Cornell Lewis and the Self Defense Brigade and other people are going to cause more problems for the Hartford Police Department. They said that publicly. For some reason, this time, either they don't want to speak about it or Almighty God has silenced their voice. They've been asked four times about our march and what

they

think about it even before it began. Each time they said no comment, no comment, no comment, no comment. So the police have not really commented on this. The new mayor of Hartford, he has commented on it. He has called us George Zimmerman wannabes. He has said that

we need to seek a spiritual solution. He said, I asked myself, what would Jesus do? Well, he's asking the wrong man about that. I went to theological school to study the New Testament in Greek and Old Testament some in Hebrew. And I'll tell him directly what Jesus would do. Jesus went into the synagogue, which represented the community in the New Testament. Inside the synagogue, there was a demon.

All the disciples were there. Either the disciples didn't see the demon or they couldn't get the demon out. Jesus got the demon out of the synagogue. So the man needs to understand if he's asking what would Jesus do, the historical Jesus, you know, I would say that Jesus would be out in the community rallying the people.

Cornell Lewis (15:45.666)

with the same scripture, come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Or if you're a Muslim, you know, the Prophet Muhammad, I believe said this, a man who desires peace must be prepared for war. That is what the holy ones would say and would do in response to the mayor of Hartford. So.

Stephen Gutowski (16:05.975)

Mm.

Cornell Lewis (16:15.926)

The police, they've kept quiet about this, but the NAACP, the mayor, the governor said he doesn't want this to occur.

Cornell Lewis (16:29.778)

I don't know of any other way to say this, so I'm just going to say it. The black people in the community that have been trotted out to speak for the anti-violence groups, they are parroting what they've been told. The black anti-violence groups that get money from Washington, they are out.

advocating against this.

like they've been given a mandate from heaven. Now I notice that the advocates for the anti-violence groups that are basically white have kept quiet. They've trotted out black people to speak against us vociferously, or as my English teacher would say, in a stentorian type fashion. OK?

And so all of that is going on behind the scenes. But as my granddaddy from Georgia said, you throw a stick into a pack of dogs, the one that hollies, the one that got hit.

Stephen Gutowski (17:43.05)

Hmm. Um, well, but bottom line, I guess, just get back to the, my first question. There was the, you haven't been any arrests from anyone from your group. You haven't nothing you've done is illegal as far as I can tell. Right. That's correct.

Cornell Lewis (17:47.262)

Okay.

Cornell Lewis (17:51.467)

No Arrest!

Cornell Lewis (17:55.83)

No, there hasn't been any arrest. The police continue to say that they are going to do things in the area to make it safe. We'll see.

Stephen Gutowski (18:08.55)

Yeah. And, and, uh, have you had any run-ins with, uh, you know, people that you're, you're marching against, you know, these, these sort of people who are committing the murders and the violence in Hartford?

Cornell Lewis (18:21.514)

We have seen a decrease in the level of criminal activity on Garden Street since we've been out there. As a matter of fact, we're going back out there Sunday night at 8 p.m. We have day patrols on the down-low and then we're going to go out there at night and we'll be out there at night. But the criminal elements are agitated.

Stephen Gutowski (18:49.767)

But this is this something that you're planning to keep up with that you're going to continue to do these. What is your long term plan, I guess, with this project?

Cornell Lewis (18:58.314)

My long-term plan is to equip the people with a different strategy that they might embrace that will allow them to do what they think is necessary to safeguard their community. That is my long-term goal. And the Self Defense Brigade will continue to do things that will help

the people. The marches that we went on for five years, we have not suffered one attack by anybody because we had a plan and we were unified. People saw that and they're asking us for help. So the long-term plan for me is to equip people with the necessary tools and strategies to fight and to continue to train people in hand-to-hand combat.

in the community and so they're equipped and then they can modify what we teach them to fit their own needs.

Stephen Gutowski (20:07.886)

Now is the hope that you get to a point where you no longer need to do the marches, you know, where, where that's not necessary anymore.

Cornell Lewis (20:15.658)

Well, yes, the people, I'm not going to be out there each and every time with the people. However, the time may come when they will no longer need to do this. And they might be able to come up with something else. But for right now, this seems to be working for them. And it seems to have.

gotten enough attention to where the power structure knows that people like yourself and other people nationally are watching and so

They're trying to make it seem as if they're doing something, whether they really want to do it or not, we don't know. But you know what? We're not going to wait on them. We're not going to listen to what they say. We're not listening to the Democrats. We're not listening to the religious leaders. We're not listening to the NAACP. We're going to do this ourselves because we see that you can't or you won't.

It doesn't seem as if the government wants to protect us and it doesn't seem as if the police can protect us. So what do you want us to do? We're not going to wait on you. If we wait on you, we're going to be in a world of trouble. So if we succeed or if we fail in this venture.

As the old spiritual goes, nobody's fault but mine. Nobody's fault but mine. If I die and my soul be lost, nobody's fault but mine.

Stephen Gutowski (22:05.43)

And can you tell us a little bit more about these training programs that you're working in the community? How do they work? You know, what are you teaching people beyond, you know, the hand-to-hand fighting? You know, what kind of firearms training are you offering? And if people want to get involved who are local to Hartford, how can they do that?

Cornell Lewis (22:25.27)

Well, what we do is we get people who are qualified in instruction about guns and safety. We get them to come and teach, you know, the people and we show them places where they can go and train. Also what we're doing is getting people to understand that in a fight, whoever stands with you, that's your brother and your sister.

So we're getting people through education classes to move beyond how a person looks and what they think, what their religion is, what their sexual orientation is, because in an alley when you're fighting, whoever stands with you, that's your brother and that's your sister. And so part of the education classes tries to get people away from this notion that people have to look like you.

in order to help you with the fight. Because historically, if you see the social dynamic of people movements, there are all kinds of people that have been involved in revolutions and social unrest and social upheavals. So that's part of the education is to get people to learn about weapons, how to handle it safely, how to get one, and also.

the dynamics of what it takes to fight and fight effectively. And then the last thing we're trying to teach people is this, you're not going to convince anybody that you're serious unless you're willing to sacrifice. You have to be willing to sacrifice in this movement. That means if you have to die in order to promote your cause, then that is what you do.

That is what the Roman soldiers did in the legions of Caesar. They signed a document in Latin called the Sacramentum. It was a document that bound their lives and their family and their possessions to Caesar. And so it was necessary to do what Caesar wanted, not what they wanted. So in this fight, if you're serious, then you need to sign some kind of document with yourself saying, I'm willing.

Cornell Lewis (24:48.738)

to do more than just run my mouth. I'm willing to do more than just march. If this is important to you, as you claim, you must be willing to lay down your life. Then and only then will those that you oppose look at you and say they have nothing to lose. What can we do?

Stephen Gutowski (25:12.046)

And, and, uh, you know, you've talked a lot about history here, uh, during this interview and, um, you know, I, I wonder how you view the self-defense, uh, organization that you're, you're working with, uh, with sort of historical, uh, movements that may be similar in nature. You know, you said you're not.

vigilante right you that these this is not a vigilante movement you're not trying to go out and arrest people or what have you this is a self-defense oriented thing you know how do you place yourself in sort of similar American movements like do you see yourself akin to like the deacons of defense the armed group that would protect the applied security for civil rights movements or even you know I to be Wells

Cornell Lewis (25:48.438)

Well, first of all-

Stephen Gutowski (26:00.41)

and her writings on armed self-defense. How do you view yourself and this movement?

Cornell Lewis (26:07.082)

Well, it's interesting people keep throwing that word of vigilante around. Most people don't know that vigilante, the idea started in San Francisco around the 1800s when the businessmen there wanted to protect their business from cowboys shooting up to town. So they hired people to come in and do that to take care of it. And then later it morphed into something else. So most people throw those words around. They don't even know how to.

things started. We're not vigilantes or vigil, practicing vigilante-ism. You know, that's something that the Democrats are throwing out to try to cloud the issue and make us seem as if we need to be demonized. I view myself historically and the people that are with me, we view ourselves as right in line with

people that have always stepped to the forefront in social movements of evils and revolutions. In London, a lady by the name of Boudicac stepped forward to fight the Romans. Okay, and so here we have an example of a woman leading people to fight against oppression. Other social movements in France.

There were people who stepped forward during the great terror and the revolution in France to fight. Oppressed people all over the world have taken up self-defense in order to protect themselves. So what we're doing is not out of the norm. As a matter of fact, historically in America, black people...

when they came to this country or were brought here against their will for the first 200 years, our first God was not Jesus. Our first God was self-defense. And for 200 years, there were revolts in America. In New Amsterdam before it was New York, in 1811 in Louisiana, there was an uprising. And of course we know about Nat Turner's rebellion.

Cornell Lewis (28:29.922)

But there were many, many more. And so what we're doing is not out of the norm for black people. If it was not for us defending ourselves in America, we might not be here. The red summer of 1917, 1918, black men came back from France, they knew how to shoot. They saw that people would die. And when they came back and went on the plantation and the boss man said, do this, and they'd say, well, wait a minute, boss.

then they weren't going back to doing what they were doing before. They took up their arms and defended themselves. And so culturally speaking, what we're doing with the Self Defense Brigade is black and brown people is right in line with what we did the first 200 years that we came to this country. I don't see self defense as something that is a bad word. I don't see armed self defense.

as something that is negative. And I think the people who try to propose that are trying to put forth what I call revisionist history about how black people survive, how other oppressed people survive all over this earth from the time of Rome, plebs against patricians up until this point now.

Stephen Gutowski (29:56.878)

Hmm. Uh, you know, and, and a lot of that, perhaps understandably with the level of violence that Hartford has seen, um, you know, you've got almost like a war-like, uh, metaphors throughout much of this interview. Do you, do you see hope for, you know, the community moving beyond that state of like violence into something where there's more reconciliation and, and is, I mean, is that, that's your ultimate goal?

Cornell Lewis (30:24.63)

Wait, hold on a minute. I heard you say something about violence. What? I didn't hear that last word.

Stephen Gutowski (30:30.742)

Yeah, you know, a lot of these metaphors that you're using are obviously war-like situations that you're referring to and, you know, the violence in Hartford has been pretty elevated and perhaps understandable that's how things are viewed right now in the community, but are you hopeful that you could move beyond that phase through these sorts of actions to get to a more peaceful stage in Hartford in the future?

Cornell Lewis (31:00.971)

Well...

Cornell Lewis (31:05.094)

I don't see what we're doing as not meaningful. I don't see it as warlike. I see it as the oppressed determining what they feel is necessary for their own liberation. And people want to depict it as warlike. But again,

Cornell Lewis (31:34.966)

People who are in power are the ones who are attempting to characterize us in those fashions. If we were singing, we shall overcome. If we were praying, if we were holding hands singing kumbaya, if we were rubbing our rosary beads, they would say Cornell's a great man. But now, I'm warlike. I'm demonizing.

I'm riling up the masses to do different things. Well, wait a minute. If you did your job like you should, we wouldn't be doing this right now. So these are not violent ideas. This is not warlike language. It is the language of the oppressed. And again, those in power have no right.

Stephen Gutowski (32:19.214)
So do you see this?

Cornell Lewis (32:34.262)
whatsoever to tell us how to fight. Many of these people that are running their mouth, they don't live in their neighborhood, they are talking from afar where it's safe, Eden-like atmosphere, manicured lawns, things of that nature. And we're catching hell right here.

in these neighborhoods because of what's going on. So they can say whatever they want to say and they can keep saying it, but I tell you plainly now and I tell them it doesn't make any difference what you say or do. I'm going to ram the agenda of the people down your throat and I'm going to make you like it.

Stephen Gutowski (33:27.606)
So you see this more as, you know, like a lifestyle of armed self-defense. And while it's maybe effective for lowering these violence that you're seeing in Hartford, it's not necessarily something that's only to be used in the state of emergency, but it's more of a lifestyle in your opinion. Is that what you're getting at here?

Cornell Lewis (33:48.17)
Well, people can use this and then all things evolve. All things take another step. I play conga drums, bongos, African dejembe, darbuka, and many other hand drums.

I'll play a tune one day a certain way and then the next week I'll play a different because I hear something different. I hear notes within the note. Movements are the same way. They start out one way and then over time, they evolve into something else. So what we're doing today might not be what the people want to do three, four, five months from now because things...

evolve. You know, and so that is how I would characterize that. And I'm quite sure that in the future, the people on guard street and in many parts of Hartford will evolve into something else where what we're doing might not even be necessary.

Stephen Gutowski (35:02.898)
Right, right. That's, I guess that's what I was trying to get at. Like he, not that you would give up the ethos or politics of, uh, or the other, the philosophy behind armed self-defense, it's just that you're hoping that if you can get through this period, use these tactics that you're using now, maybe you won't need to use them in the, in the future. These sort of, uh, you know, organized, uh, marches, like you're doing with some of the stuff you described earlier.

Cornell Lewis (35:05.974)
Yeah, I agree with that.

Cornell Lewis (35:23.354)
I agree with that. Yeah, I agree with that. I agree with that a hundred percent that

Cornell Lewis (35:34.85)
there will come a time when people like me are no longer needed. We are looked, we'll be looked upon as being part of the anti-deluvian period, you know, like dinosaurs. And that's fine. And I understand historically that things change and times change and people move on, ideas move on. But for right now,

Here in space and time, this is what people is focusing on. And if they come to me one day and say, "Cornell, listen, we want to thank you "for what you've done. "We're going to move on to something else.' "I would not be offended. "I would get out the way, "and I would wait to see what they came up with.' "Because I understand this is the way of

social movements."

and all things change from something strange to something new. And I look forward to seeing how this evolves in the future.

Okay.

Stephen Gutowski (36:51.128)

But for the time for the time being, as things are now, you're going to continue these marches where can people find out more about you and the self-defense brigade if they're interested in joining or helping you?

Cornell Lewis (37:03.702)

We have a Facebook page called Self Defense Brigade. You can go there to get more information. People can also contact me on Facebook and I'll have somebody contact them. Let me just say that people who do contact us, we and we decide to work with them.

We will work with them according to what they feel they can do. See, people like me and other people will go into a cave and kill a dragon. Some people are not going to do that. But there are people who can sharpen up the sword. You can do that. You can help recruit people. You can help show up at marches. You can.

solicit money so we can buy equipment for other things. Not everybody has to be on the front lines. And we understand that. And so we assess people, their willingness to get involved, whether they have a job or not, whether they have children, whether they have physical problems or cognitive issues. In a war, in a social movement, there's a place.

for everybody. If we work as a mechanism, we can pull this off. So we're not going to just get anybody and throw them out there and say, okay, we're going to run headlong until the lions did. Not everybody's made like that. And I understand that. The people like myself will do the rough work. The other people can do other things that make sure that we are successful when we...

go out. So contact me on Facebook, contact the Self Defense Brigade on the Self Defense Brigade page and then we'll have somebody contact you and then we'll see how you fit in and everybody has a place. And we have all kinds of people that help us out front and behind the scenes.

Stephen Gutowski (39:31.262)

All right, well, thank you so much for joining us and sharing your perspective with us and giving us some insight into your operation. We really appreciate it. We're gonna head over to our news update now.

Cornell Lewis (39:41.916)

Okay, thank you.

Jake Fogleman (00:03.486)

Alright ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the weekly news update. I'm contributing writer, Jake Fogelman, joined as always by Re-Load founder, Steven Gatowski. How we doing this week, Steve?

Stephen Gutowski (00:11.825)

I'm doing pretty good. How about you, Jake?

Jake Fogleman (00:14.338)

Doing pretty good. Uh, you know, maybe listeners that don't follow Colorado might not know, but we just survived a snowpocalypse. Uh, downtown Denver where I'm at, we only got about nine inches, but parts of the state got over four feet of snow in, in a day. So that's pretty crazy.

Stephen Gutowski (00:19.873)

Right?

Stephen Gutowski (00:25.128)

Only. Well, did you take advantage at all? Like snowboarding? No. No, no, I don't. I work from home every day, so that's not a big perk as going out into the fresh powder and skiing or snowboarding. That would be the...

Jake Fogleman (00:32.382)

I worked from home if you consider that taking advantage of it. I didn't go into my office. Yeah.

Jake Fogleman (00:46.866)

Yeah, unfortunately it was like very heavy, wet, slushy kind of snow that fell. So that like, we had a lot of trees go down and so it wasn't really great skiing or snowboarding snow, just kind of enough to be annoying for everybody.

Stephen Gutowski (00:57.644)

Eh, well, you know, when does your winter actually end out there?

Jake Fogleman (01:02.518)

Yeah, in Colorado, it's kind of schizophrenic the way the weather works. March is our most, our heaviest precipitation month, even as the temperatures get warmer. So it's kind of, we're in that weird limbo space right now. Uh, but we've gotten snow as late as June some years. It's yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (01:15.652)

Oh, oh my gosh. That's crazy. Yeah. We're, uh, we're in that like fluctuating season too, here in Virginia, where it goes back and forth between cold and I think it actually snowed not long ago here at night, um, and now it's in the 70s. So typical stuff we're at, we're almost at, uh, the cherry blossom peak. Week, right? That's when everybody goes to the mall and looks at the trees, which I'll probably be doing with my girlfriend here.

uh this weekend so um but of course it's going to be freezing cold right after that so uh it's yeah maybe the might be a shorter peak than usual because the trees might not make it through the freezing temperatures that come up but we'll see uh it should be nice it should be nice soon here but anyway what do we got in terms of headlines

Jake Fogleman (01:55.807)

Yeah, the freeze.

Jake Fogleman (02:05.422)

Sure. So from the newsletter, we got an interesting story out of the center square, mostly coming from Professor James Allen Fox, who we've had on the show before. And he's reported out that mass gun violence, which is he's using the gun violence archive sort of definition of public shootings or four or more people are shot. Right. And it's interesting. He said it's down 48% so far.

Stephen Gutowski (02:23.017)

Yeah, the broader definition.

Jake Fogleman (02:29.706)

Which is a pretty big deal and his criticism is it's not getting as much attention as obviously when those numbers take up. Uh, but it's still a pretty big result, pretty stark drop in that sort of, you know, big public display of violence.

Stephen Gutowski (02:34.582)

Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (02:40.308)

Absolutely. And actually to this point, we haven't had any mass shootings that qualify for the gun violence archive definition, which is the stricter definition, I think what more people would think of when they think of a mass shooting, but you know, four or more people killed in a act in public. And so there haven't actually, haven't been any of those as of recording, which we're recording on Friday, March 15th. You know, obviously the problem with these

events is that they're, they can be fairly random, right? So there's no way of telling if this is gonna be a continuing trend or if we might have a terrible incident later today. And I think that's one of the things, if you go back and listen to our interview with James Allen Fox from a couple of years ago, that's one of the things he pointed out, this sort of.

Stephen Gutowski (03:33.008)

idea that there's sort of a mean number of these events each year and whatever clustering that might happen there is not as significant as a lot of people make it out to be. So you'll get periods where there aren't any shootings like we've had the beginning of this year and then you'll get periods where there are several right in a row and it's not necessarily

because of any specific singular cause. So, you know, we'll have to have him back on though. I think it's, because this is, it's obviously a very positive trend to see not having these big mass shootings at the beginning of the year. If you go back to 2022, it was like that up until, well, March 15th and was the first one that year, I think March 14th. And there've been a couple other years, if you look through Professor Fox's database where you haven't had.

a public mass shooting where four or more killed through the first several months of the year. But the fact that GBA numbers, that broader definition are down too is also interesting because we know, we've talked about it, we've reported on it, that last year there was a significant drop in murder across the United States. We had that surge during the immediate aftermath of the pandemic where murder rate went.

went way above what it had been for the previous 20 years or so. And last year we saw that come back down to earth closer to what the pre pandemic rates were not is not quite there yet to the 2018, 2019 levels, but the largest single drop in murder.

in the murder rate in a year, I believe, is what we saw last year. So at the same time, you're still getting those GBA mass shooting numbers rising, which is fascinating. And you still had eight mass shootings that hit that violence project definition, which is

Stephen Gutowski (05:36.808)

in line with the highs that we had seen the last couple of years too. So that you hadn't seen that same effect on mass attacks that you had on the overall murder rate. And now maybe we're seeing it this year going into the beginning of 2024 here. So I don't know. I'd like to have Professor Fox back on the show and maybe talk about this more in detail. Hopefully he can join us maybe next week. I'll reach out.

Jake Fogleman (06:02.25)

Yeah, no, that'd be great for him to give us some more context on why these why he thinks these shootings are going down at least. Then the last couple links we're going to talk about deal with actually your home state and my home state. So first out of Virginia, obviously, they've had a quite they had quite a busy legislative session on gun control bills. And a lot of people watching to see what Governor Youngkin was going to do since he's the Republican governor and both chambers of the Virginia legislature Democrats and he's acted actually on the first pair or

I think three bills he's acted on, gun control bills anyway, that have been sent to his desk, including videoing two of them, so that's pretty interesting.

Stephen Gutowski (06:37.236)

Yeah, he viewed that too and then he sent one back with recommendations. This was one about informing parents of the risks of guns, I guess, and he sent it back with a recommendation that they add a bunch of other things to inform parents of, like their rights to challenge curriculum in schools, things of that nature. And so we'll see what the legislature does with that. But yeah, it's an interesting dynamic right now in Virginia. One of the most interesting

across the country because Democrats have a very slim majority in the House and Senate here and obviously the governor Len Youngkin is a Republican and you've seen uniform nearly uniform

Stephen Gutowski (07:23.704)

voting patterns from each party where they've, the Democrats have sent like 40 bills, 40 gun bills to the governor's desk and almost all of them passed on party lines. There were maybe one or two, there were a couple that you had a single Republican senator join in on these were some of the less strict gun control measures, but you had the Democratic

party in Virginia voting complete lockstep with each other on this issue. And for the more extreme measures, uh, the stricter gun control measures that you could, you could have. I mean, there's assault weapons ban being the most obvious example of that, but also the sort of a broom response type bills. Uh, we have, we have restrictions like that coming through restrictions on, um,

where you can get gun safety training for your concealed carry permit. Uh, there is just a slew of new restrictions that every Democrat has voted for, which is, which is pretty remarkable, uh, and which it seems the governor is likely to veto all of them. Um, he has not now, like we've reported this before on the show, but he, we reached out to his office and they told us that they didn't have a specific position on every bill.

but that they stood by the governor's state of the state address where he said he believes Virginia already has among the strictest gun laws in the country. Yes, his predecessor had signed universal background checks and a number of gun-free zone restrictions, local gun-free zone restrictions into law in the previous session before he became governor and the red flag law. So Virginia already has.

is somewhere in the middle on this issue compared to a lot of other states that are, you know, either more red or more blue, right? So that Virginia is already kind of in the middle, but the governor is signaling that he's not necessarily going to sign any of these things. Maybe some of the more minor ones we'll have to see, but I also talked to a source who has worked in Virginia politics and that was essentially their take as well that the governor is unlikely to sign.

Stephen Gutowski (09:43.016)

any of the major reforms. So, but to me, I think the political dynamics are the most interesting thing going on in Virginia on guns right now, especially with the Democratic Party being completely in line with everyone voting for all of these new restrictions. You didn't see any dissension there. And even on the Republican side, you really only saw a single Senator move in favor of any of these bills and not.

not the more headline grabbing ones. So pretty fascinating. But yeah, what's going on with Colorado? I imagine they're kind of a similar situation there. You got a lot of bills coming through.

Jake Fogleman (10:22.178)

Yeah, I was gonna say, it seems like Colorado and Virginia in particular, where the two states that decided this year is going to be go for broke time for more gun bills, um, Colorado is a little bit different dynamic. It's not quite as narrowly divided. Actually Democrats have more control of the state government than they've had in decades, um, and they're taking advantage of it by, they have 10 bills so far introduced, including some headline grabbing ones, like an assault weapon ban, the sort of copycat brew and response style bill from California that we've I've covered before. And we've talked about on the show before.

Um, plus a bunch of other insurance requirements, uh, gun credit card tracking codes, you name it. Like it's a very long list of gun control bill wish lists type items. Um, and so yeah, the fact that they're, they've made, you know, Colorado we've talked about has been sort of the bright spot of the gun control movement over the last decade. They've gone from a D rating from the gun groups to now an A minus rating in Gifford's last report. And yet there's still 10 more bills that they want to pursue this year. So that'll be one to watch. None of them have made it to the governor's desk just yet.

But I think Colorado will again be a state to watch for sort of the trend in gun control politics.

Stephen Gutowski (11:26.172)

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And that's probably gonna stay that way because I don't think Colorado's politics are moving in a different direction at this point. Although it has been interesting to see the governor there avoiding assault weapons ban, right? Even though there's been a resurgence for that in gun control politics lately.

Jake Fogleman (11:42.451)

Yeah, so.

Jake Fogleman (11:46.766)

I'll say the sources I've spoken to again, don't think that he's on board with this renewed assault weapon ban effort. Same thing that happened last year. So, you know, there's no way of knowing for sure whether or not this is going to go anywhere, but based on how this one was introduced and it doesn't look like the governor's changed his mind on this. I don't think the assault weapon ban one will become law. Some of the other ones though, are sort of, you know, wild cards. I think most of them will probably pass and be signed. Um, maybe the Bruin response bill could also be another one that he might try to be a moderating voice on, but we just, we just don't know.

Stephen Gutowski (12:15.828)

Yeah, I think another point for Yonkin in Virginia to the direction that he's not going to sign the vast majority of these gun bills is that Democrats in the legislature had tried to use one of his marquee issues to get him to compromise on and sign some of these bills that they want on the gun issue. And that was the stadium funding. The governor wants to move

the Washington capitals and wizards to Virginia. He wants to put them in the Northern Virginia near the Pentagon. And the Democrats have torpedoed that plan and had initially tried to use it as a bargaining chip to get some of these gun bills through. And so now that plan's dead and at least from all appearances on...

the outside instead and I think that's probably a good indication that you aren't going to see young can sign any significant gun bills but yeah so it's Virginia and Colorado definitely a lot going on maybe not a lot ending up in law in Virginia but the politics there are pretty fascinating and maybe representative of where we are.

as a country on the issue, where at this point, you don't really have any Democrats left in Virginia that are dissenting on even the most radical, the furthest left policy positions on guns. They're all pretty much in agreement. And that comes even after, you know, 2020, where you saw a huge protest movement throughout the entire state that culminated in a giant protest at the Capitol.

Um, and that also resulted in Democrats, even just four years ago. Um, there were four senators in, uh, for democratic senators that blocked the assault weapons ban from being passed at that time. And now I think most of them aren't in office anymore and, and nobody on the democratic side voted against the assault weapons ban that was proposed this time. So interesting change in, in that party.

Stephen Gutowski (14:38.941)

at this point.

Jake Fogleman (14:40.634)

Certainly and we'll keep an eye on both of the states going forward to see what becomes of these bills in the end But heading into some of the stories we wrote this week you had an interesting one out of California Their Department of Justice headed by obviously their attorney general Rob Bonta just released their armed and prohibited persons systems report

basically documenting all the folks that they know have guns and for whatever reason, whether they're convicted of felonies or they have a mental illness prohibition or restraining order prohibition, who they have documented as having those firearms despite their status and who they've taken guns from in that instance. And you reported some interesting numbers from that report.

Stephen Gutowski (15:16.692)

Yeah, so they've, these are these people that they suspect have guns that shouldn't have them based on the factors that you just mentioned. And so they have a long list of these people. And they removed 9,000 or so people from the list and they only added about

you know, 8,000 back to it or a little, I think it was like more like 8,500 back to the list of new people that they suspect

shouldn't have guns that they shouldn't. And so that, you know, they're making some modest progress on cutting down the backlog that they have in this database, which they've had around since 2006 and have actually only rarely made significant progress in cutting through the backlog. And also, you know, I guess it should be

noted that they removed 9,000 people from the list. They only actually recovered about 1,400 guns. So presumably there are a number of other ways you can be removed from the list. One, like your restraining order expires or your parole expires or they make contact with you and they're assured that you don't actually have the gun that you previously bought. Because remember in California they have a

a gun registry. So at least in theory, they know who owns guns. And, um, and then they know if you've been convicted of some crime or, or done something to trigger a prohibition and that's how this list gets put together. Right. And, and so this year was relatively successful one for them in terms of, uh, cutting down the list. I mean, they only made the list was cut down by about 1.75%. So not

huge progress, they still have about 24,000 people on this list of suspected prohibited possessors. But this was actually a positive report in there for the state because a lot of years, they don't actually cut down the list at all and they add more people than they're able to verify shouldn't be on it or whose guns they've confiscated. And so, that kind of goes to the point that I've.

Stephen Gutowski (17:28.748)

got in a members piece that I'm working on right now, which is, you know, I think this is sort of your, your best case scenario for a gun confiscation program. Cause you're targeting people who most Americans agree shouldn't have guns, you know, convicted felons. I mean, there's some controversies on these things, obviously, nonviolent felons being one area where there's, there's a lot of court cases on that or domestic violence restraining orders.

That's one of the cases at the Supreme Court right now, whether that's the constitutional restriction. But by and large, most Americans agree with these, that the people that are on this list, most of them probably shouldn't be allowed to have guns. And so you got a relatively uncontroversial group of people to be disarmed, I guess, is just the base level point I'm trying to make there.

And you also are in a state where they register all the guns. So they, in theory, know at least most people who own guns and they can match them up as they're trying to do with this program of people who've done something that means they can't own guns anymore and people who have previously bought guns. And you have information about where those people live, at least when they bought the guns or when they were arrested or what have you. And so...

In theory, there's a pretty straightforward way of just go and make contact with these people. And if they still have their guns, confiscate them. Right. So sort of a best case scenario for a gun confiscation program. And they're still not doing very good job. I guess is the bottom line here. They still have about 24,000 people on this list. You know, of course this list is only according to the state, according to this report is only about, it's less than 1% of all gun owners in California. It's not a very large.

number of people relative to the entire state's population of gun owners. Um, this is another thing, like there not only is a list of people that most, um, Americans don't think should have guns, but it's also pretty small as compared to the number of people who actually have guns and who, and those are the people who've gone through the legal process to get them, right? And so it just kind of underscores how difficult a mass confiscation program would actually be in real life.

Stephen Gutowski (19:50.068)

Um, you know, to the point where it's wildly impractical, um, you know, this is 24,000 people and they still have trouble even modestly reducing that number after years, this is, this program has been in place almost 20 years. Um, and if you look at the details, they've most of the people still on the list, they are basically cold cases where they have no further leads.

where they've tried to investigate and find these folks and figure out if they still have guns or take away the guns if they

do have them and haven't been able to. And so, you know, even...

even with the scenario where you're going after people that most would agree don't shouldn't have guns. Um, it's still very hard, even in a state like California where there's a lot more resources dedicated to something like this, they had this one of the only States that does this kind of program at all. And, um, and you know, of course, the difficulty of taking people's guns is only going to increase as you get further away from the point where people agree somebody shouldn't have guns, right?

So if you just try to go after every gun owner in California, well, that's millions of people, not a couple, you know, 10,000 to 20,000 or whatever. And then if you go to the rest of the country, I mean, what's 47% of the country reports having a gun in the home, 52% of voters report having a gun in the home at this point. Those are two different polls, the AP and NBC, but you get the idea. About half the country has a gun. That's 100.

120, 130 million American households.

Stephen Gutowski (21:38.944)

You know, it's just not feasible. There's something like the Small Arms Survey estimates about 400 million guns, and that was back in 2018. I think the more modern estimates and that the trace has done an estimate that used ATF manufacturing data and puts the number closer to 500 million. You know, the California program has confiscated 1,400 guns.

You know, it's just not that there's obviously no risk. There are no way that you could boost the program if you spend a lot more money on trying to round up these guns. I just think it gives you an example of here's the best case scenario you could think of for a program of confiscating firearms. And it still struggles mightily. And I think the implications of that is just another example of why mass gun confiscation wouldn't.

wouldn't work in real life.

Jake Fogleman (22:40.874)

Yeah, no, it's an interesting point and reload members should definitely go check out that piece. Cause it'll be live by the time this podcast is live. So reload members should go check it out. Um, then you have another interesting piece this week about a court case coming out of a criminal law case, actually dealing with the federal prohibition on, uh, illegal immigrants possessing firearms. Uh, and there was a judge that actually dismissed a case against a person under the standard because she said as applied to this person, that prohibition was unconstitutional if you want to tell us a little bit about the ruling.

Stephen Gutowski (23:10.644)

Yeah, pretty interesting ruling. In fact, I think this was from an Obama appointee. So, you know, going against what I think a lot of people expect a judge to rule one way or the other based on whoever appointed them. And I think it's important to note that that's not always the case. But yeah, they ruled essentially this, the person who had been charged in this case.

was just charged for simple possession of a gun, no other crimes on their record beyond entering the country illegally or being in the country illegally, which is not even a felony, it's a misdemeanor crime. And it's certainly not a crime of violence, you know, it's a nonviolent crime. This person had no record of violent criminal activity. And so the judge found there was, you know, in line with

uh, range for instance, another case we've covered a lot, uh, in the third circuit, uh, court of appeals where, you know, the person who had been convicted of food stamp fraud, essentially, you know, lying about their income to get food stamps, uh, that they, which was qualified as a felony, even though it was a state misdemeanor, um, you know, that they can't be barred from owning guns because their crime was nonviolent and they aren't dangerous. And so the, this judge used a-

very similar standard in her case. She had actually initially back in 2022, before the Supreme Court's Bruin decision was

handed down with a new standard for how to judge second-memory cases, it actually ruled against this defendant. But then now in light of the ruling and the subsequent appeals court rulings that question these sort of nonviolent convictions leading to permanent.

Stephen Gutowski (25:08.153)

permanent loss of gun rights that basically this case needed to be revisited and she found in favor of the undocumented immigrant. So, pretty interesting and wide reaching, potentially ruling here. One that also caused a bit of controversy. First of all, it adds to that debate among lower court.

judges that you've sort of talked about last week with these, what standard works for these various federal prohibitions on gun ownership or gun possession and how the Supreme Court is probably going to have to step in pretty soon to clear up some of these things. I think yours was specifically about felony possession, but the questions are pretty similar here even with the prohibition on

illegal immigrants owning guns, even though it's not a felony technically, for somebody to stay in the country, you know, overstay their visa or what have you, be here without legal status. So you know, I think it adds to that urgency for the court to take up a case and start to explain its view of how these things should be decided, or at least further explain it, obviously, the Bureau in itself.

laid out a whole test, but we haven't gotten anything beyond that from the court yet. But this also started a debate among gun rights advocates. You had Larry Keene from the National Shooting Sports Foundation question the ruling based on the concept that the right of the people to keep and bear arms should not be infringed. It only applies to basically people in the community, the political community. This is something you've heard in a number of other cases as well.

The government has argued this a number of times, including in range where it was rejected. But the idea that historically there were sort of groups outside of the political community, outside of the people of the United States. And, you know, there's some argument that includes non-citizens or people who are not legally allowed to be here. And so.

Stephen Gutowski (27:29.024)

But there was pushback on that from, there was actually a whole back and forth from a number of gun rights lawyers who sort of probably debated this question, including Costas Moros, who we've had on the show and has written for us, analysis pieces for us in the past. And then Matt, sorry, who's I think better known as Fuddbusters online, but.

Matt chimed in as well criticizing Larry's take and him and Kostas went back and forth on this. It's in the piece, but I also actually have them, they've agreed to write something for us laying out their positions, which I think are going, I think it's gonna be interesting for people to read that. And I think it's sort of a core part of this overall debate in the wake of Bruin on how to look at these historical laws and what they.

what they actually mean and how they should be analogized to modern prohibitions. So I'm looking forward to seeing what those guys have to say. And of course we'll publish that for you once we have them with us and I'm looking forward to it.

Jake Fogleman (28:43.07)

Yeah, it should be fascinating. And it's a very interesting question, not only because just who can be disarmed has been a hotly contested area of second amendment jurisprudence, but this question in particular, illegal immigration has all sorts of cross-cutting political cleavages. And so I think it should be a fascinating debate and people should definitely check out those two pieces.

Stephen Gutowski (29:00.544)

Yeah, and then you actually have a piece on another magazine band being upheld, and it's some of the implications of that.

Jake Fogleman (29:10.942)

Yeah, so we had a big ruling out of the first circuit.

Boston based Federal Appeals Court, essentially upholding Rhode Island's ban on magazines that hold more than 10 rounds. That's how they define their large capacity magazine ban. And it's, you know, pretty in line with a lot of the hardware, quote unquote, hardware ban cases. So things like assault, quote unquote, assault weapon bans and magazine bans, there's sort of been this coalescing of judges that uphold these laws around a particular reading of the Bruin test where they say

Sure, we'll grant you that there's no direct analog to the founding area of hardware bands. But Bruin instructs us that things like unprecedented societal concerns brought about by dramatic technological changes allow us to do a more nuanced approach to history allows us to analogize more loosely over a broader period of time or so they say. And so they tend to bring things like the Bowie knife bands that were fairly common in the in the country in the late 19th century, so late 1800s.

Even things like the National Firearms Act, when we crack down on short barrel rifles, sawed off shotguns, machine guns, that sort of thing. And they say that's, that demonstrates. Right. Yeah. We're getting into the 20th century in a lot of these cases. Uh, but they say that demonstrates a tradition of basically governments responding to new innovations in weaponry that lead to some murder or some organized crime in the case of the National Firearms Act. Yeah. And that demonstrates a tradition that allows.

Stephen Gutowski (30:17.812)
Yeah, which is from the 1930s, yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (30:34.464)
Yeah, societal problems, yeah.

Jake Fogleman (30:39.358)
you to then look at modern AR-15s or magazines and say that we can ban those as well. So certainly interesting. Uh, obviously gun rights people have a problem, I think with that, you see a lot of criticism saying that that's, you know, you're misreading Bruin or you're making a mockery of Bruin by drawing on all these late non-founding area analogies or your interest balancing by another, by other means. Um.

Stephen Gutowski (30:51.46)
Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (31:01.784)
But the bigger problem here, which you touched on a lot in your, it was sort of the core of your member piece, your analysis on this whole situation. Cause you're right, like this has been the go-to justification for upholding a lot of these hardware bands and it's become commonplace in these cases. And one of the issues is that these cases all take place in the same types of jurisdictions, right? The same circuits and

And that's because they are the circuits that oversee the states that have these laws. There's not that many states that have these laws. And they're sort of geographically isolated from elsewhere. You know, they're more liberal states, and they produce more liberal circuits because of how the federal court system works, right? I mean, there's a home state. You know, people from those circuits get to nominate judges in a lot of cases. There have been a lot of

like senators from those states have more say in who gets appointed to those circuits. And so there's, it's created this kind of geographical trap, I guess, for gun rights proponents, right? Is that sort of what you're getting at?

Jake Fogleman (32:17.586)
Yeah, they're sort of caught between a rock and a hard place because the standard for upholding hardware bands has become almost so commonplace. And because like you said, there's only about a dozen or so states with assault weapon bands slash magazine bands where these challenges could even theoretically take place, you're sort of very limited in where these challenges can go and they're going to all the same judges that all use the same standard. So it's almost like, you know, they're going to lose every time. And we've seen that and reflected in many of these federal court rulings

struck down in most cases. So they pretty much have to rely on the Supreme Court one of these days. We don't know when. We've covered the fact that so far they've shown hesitance to take up assault and man cases. Until that happens, it seems like that trend's going to continue where it's just going to be, this is the standard, we're going to go with this more nuanced approach and hardware brands are allowed to stay.

Stephen Gutowski (33:09.228)

Right, and of course without circuit splits, because a lot of the circuits dealing with these things all seem to be fairly well in agreement on this justification that you're talking about, that makes it less likely for the court to take it up, or at least makes it a less urgent issue, especially with all the other things that are there teed up to take, like these found in possession bans, challenges to those. So.

Jake Fogleman (33:31.809)

Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (33:35.02)

I don't know. It's interesting. And I think it is, you know, that is obviously not the only way this court can take up a case that could decide to take up a solvence case, especially if it finds that this justification is as bad as gun rights advocates say it is, right? The court can itself go in and take this case, which is kind of what Bruin was to some extent right there. They

A lot of Bruin is just complaining about the lower courts and how they have, how Google has decided to turn itself on. Lovely. But sorry about that. Yeah. So, you know, we'll see what the court does. They I think will be the ultimate. I mean, they always have the ultimate say, but it's whether they get involved or how fast they get involved, I think is the bigger question. You know, Bruin.

was a lot of complaining about the lower courts not doing what they wanted, but it didn't happen until what, 14 years after Heller was handed down. So, you know, that's another issue that the gun rights advocates complain about. And we'll see what the court does this time around.

Jake Fogleman (34:41.194)

Right.

Stephen Gutowski (34:52.92)

But yeah, we'll have to keep all that in mind and we're gonna obviously stay focused on it. But for now, we actually have a member segment, one of my favorites, so we're gonna head over to that.

Stephen Gutowski (00:02.777)

All right, it's time for one of my favorite segments, our member segment. We have with us another Reload member this week, Wayne Lurch. Welcome to the show, Wayne. I appreciate you taking some time out to come on and have just a little discussion with us.

Wayne Lerch (00:18.254)

Well, thanks for having me.

Stephen Gutowski (00:19.929)

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. You know, these segments are designed to give us a little bit of insight into reload membership and what folks are like and some of the different backgrounds and points of view that we have here from our PANG members, people that make the reload possible, that support our work. And so, yeah, can you just give us a little bit, just a quick introduction, just a little bit about yourself?

Wayne Lerch (00:24.256)

Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (00:44.174)

Sure, I live in DC, relatively new to owning firearms and I have my own business. I'm a home inspector in the Washington metropolitan area and I'm also a RSO at a local gun range.

Stephen Gutowski (01:00.665)

Oh, wonderful. And a little bit about your background. Where did you, when you were growing up, where are you from, first of all, and did you have any experience with firearms?

Wayne Lerch (01:12.142)

So I'm a native Washingtonian. There are not a whole lot of us around. And I remember as a young kid, my father taking us to, I think, somebody's backyard gun range and being able to shoot a handgun. And that was it until after I graduated from high school where some buddies of mine and I, we went out to a local ski trap range out in Greenbelt, Maryland. And I shot trap, really enjoyed it, was actually not bad at it either. So went there a couple of times.

But then didn't touch guns until what three, four years ago when. So.

Stephen Gutowski (01:48.697)

Interesting. Yeah. Yeah. That's actually how I got into shooting as well as with skeet shooting in a sort of backyard setting after college. But but yeah. So you that was your experience with it. But then you you didn't you weren't into the sport for a while. You didn't know guns until just recently. Right. What happened there?

Wayne Lerch (01:53.933)

Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (01:57.869)

Mm -hmm. Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (02:07.98)

Right. Right. So in the mid late teens when things started, well, up until recently, relatively recently, I couldn't own a handgun in DC until the Heller decision. And I thought about it, but yeah. But it was convoluted and not easy to get a gun at that time. Actually the only FFL at the time,

was in the police department. So there's apparently a guy in the police department that was the FFL. Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (02:45.945)

Yeah, and actually he retired in 2020.

Stephen Gutowski (02:51.673)

Literally the only licensed firearms dealer in Washington DC was the actual police department itself, which created a lot of issues, but they did eventually find people to come in and replace them, which is probably a good thing. Now there's two for the whole city, which, you know, not great. And no actual gun stores either. Yeah.

Wayne Lerch (02:57.74)

Police Department, yep.

Wayne Lerch (03:04.076)

Right. Right. Yeah.

Two, two, but luckily for me, exactly, but luckily for me, the first FFL outside the police department had come on just when I bought my first gun. And what happened was that I was a bike race official for USA Cycling. And a couple of guys that I officiated with were into guns and me.

And while I was never anti-gun, I'm a liberal, have been my entire life. I was pro-gun control. And then talking to my friends, realized that I was wrong. You know, they were reasonable people. I think I'm a reasonable person. We listened

to each other, listened to our arguments and it changed my opinion. And as things started to get a little crazy for me, in...

the teens as a gay man. I got worried about my safety in the district. So I decided to get a gun. I was going to get a gun for self protection and the target shoot because I remembered it being fun. Well, I found out how much fun it really is. So I've been buying guns on a regular basis. I'm actually on a first name basis with a lot of the people at the

police department from registering guns, maybe a little too often. So, and you know, I'm nice, they're nice. So we have a nice relationship. But I got my CCW. And in doing that and believing that if I'm going to carry a firearm, I have to be well trained. So I took classes with shooting at least once a week to become proficient.

Wayne Lerch (05:05.997)

And in doing that and seeing how some people act in gun ranges and their lack of safety considerations and complaining to the management, they decide to bring on RSOs. Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (05:21.625)

public ranges. Yeah, public ranges with no RSS can be a, you know, you can have some concerns there sometimes, right?

Wayne Lerch (05:28.525)

Yeah, so they, you know, what I loved about that range and why I was shooting there is because they listen, A, they're really friendly and B, listen to people. You know, if you have a good idea, they're going to listen. And then they asked me if I wanted to become an RSO. So be careful what you ask for. Yeah. Right.

Stephen Gutowski (05:49.561)

Alright, he was concerned about the safety and they said, alright, well, you should be coming to our zone and help us out then.

Wayne Lerch (05:56.109)

And that kind of feeds right into basically I was a safety PO when I was in the Navy. I'm a home inspector and one of my big focuses is safety. So that kind of fits right into my personality. So I got certification and been an RSO for a couple of years now.

Stephen Gutowski (06:01.163)

you

Stephen Gutowski (06:11.449)

Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (06:17.689)

Yeah, you know, one of the interesting things about that that whole story there, the timeline is to me is part of it is pretty common, right? It's pretty common thing to hear, right? People get maybe they get concerned about their safety. And so they're like, all right, I should buy.

Wayne Lerch (06:28.365)

Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (06:35.405)

Mm -hmm.

Stephen Gutowski (06:36.409)

just in case I need one or what have you. And so the self -defense aspect might be the primary motivator, but then when you get the gun and you go shooting, one of the things I think is commonly underrated or under discussed, especially in major media when you're talking about firearms ownership, is the enjoyable aspect of it. People might go out and buy a gun because they want to be able to protect themselves, which does get a lot of discussion, but...

Wayne Lerch (06:43.789)

Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (06:57.037)

Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (07:02.765)

Mm -hmm.

Stephen Gutowski (07:05.113)

Once they do that, they find, a lot of them at least, find that it's fun. I mean, shooting, target shooting is fun. Working on guns can be fun if you like mechanical things, building guns, teaching people.

Wayne Lerch (07:08.43)

Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (07:15.022)

Mm -hmm.

Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (07:19.737)

you know, as an instructor or a safety officer can be an enjoyable experience as well for a lot of people. And that's, that's one thing I take away from what you're saying here is like, it will, you know, you, you might've had that safety personal, you know, safety motivation, but then you also just really liked shooting and, and collecting firearms.

Wayne Lerch (07:40.622)

It's a lot of, I've, I've, yeah. And I've gotten into competition. I'm shooting USBSA now, falling steel competition. Yeah, I'm not great at it, but it is a blast. I mean, and the camaraderie is just, I mean, it's amazing the diversity of people who shoot guns. It's not just a bunch of old white guys, but it's, it's incredibly diverse. And I love that aspect of it. And, and.

Wayne Lerch (08:13.774)

persuasions and backgrounds who want nothing more than to help each other get better and impart information. So that's another thing about the community that really appeals to me.

Stephen Gutowski (08:28.473)

Yeah, no, absolutely. You know, I think the most diverse thing that I do as a hobby is is shooting. You know, I like all kinds of stuff and there's plenty of diversity in a lot of sports. You know, there's different sports I like, but, you know, hockey and I enjoy snowboarding and stuff like things like that. And when you go to the range, you're going to see a much wider variety, especially here in northern Virginia, where I am or in D.C., you know.

Wayne Lerch (08:36.59)

Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (08:43.63)

Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (08:49.39)

Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (08:52.878)

Yes.

Mm -hmm.

Stephen Gutowski (08:57.561)

that you're going to, which wouldn't be in DC because it doesn't have any public ranges, but in the metro area are going to be very, very diverse clientele at those places, much more so than, you know, the ski mountain or what have you. So it is, I think, another underrated aspect to all of this. But so you mentioned, obviously, that you're liberal.

Wayne Lerch (09:02.862)

Exactly.

Wayne Lerch (09:14.19)

Right.

Wayne Lerch (09:20.686)

Mm -hmm.

Stephen Gutowski (09:26.969)

And.

Wayne Lerch (09:27.022)

Yep.

Stephen Gutowski (09:29.529)

How does that interact with your gun ownership? How do you view that? We've interviewed people from all sorts of different political backgrounds here on the show, especially the membership, but also you're seeing sort of a rise in liberal gun owners. We have the liberal gun club is one major example of that, but they're not the only ones, of course. How do you see the, I guess, the political side of all this?

Wayne Lerch (09:37.902)

Mm -hmm. Yeah.

Wayne Lerch (09:45.486)

Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (09:56.719)

So I think that gun ownership and gun rights fits in perfectly with being a liberal, that everybody should have the right to protect themselves. And whether you like it or not, guns, handguns particularly, are the easiest or the most common way to protect oneself because they are concealable. In a home, while I much prefer to have a rifle,

A handgun is probably much more practical, particularly in a small house or apartment. Also, it's like one of my problems with gun control is that the people it hurts the most are the people who need it the most, which are poor people, people in areas that are underserved by transportation. As discussing earlier, the fact that you can't take a firearm

on public transportation in the District of Columbia really does limit, even if you have a permit, it makes it very difficult for people from underserved areas or more dangerous areas to protect themselves. So protecting those who have less, I think fits in perfectly with a liberal mindset.

Stephen Gutowski (11:00.121)

Even if you have a permit, yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (11:23.033)

And so speaking of, I guess, the politics of this, you know, the reload here, we cover policy and politics and culture, firearms. How did you come across the reload? What made you want to become a member?

Wayne Lerch (11:27.373)

Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (11:36.045)

So when I was first thinking about getting a gun, same thing when I bought a motorcycle or was going to get a motorcycle, I used YouTube to scare myself and to learn how to protect myself with what is a dangerous item. Motorcycles, you have to ride them like you think everybody's trying to kill you because, well, they may not intentionally be doing it, but that's what they're doing.

Stephen Gutowski (11:50.745)

You

Stephen Gutowski (12:00.665)

Hmm.

Wayne Lerch (12:05.07)

Same thing with handguns or firearms. So I started watching a lot of YouTube videos and I realized there are some people who I shouldn't listen to, but a lot of people I should. And I also got some suggestions from people who I know and trust. And I can't remember which channel it was that you were on where I saw you. And it was like, oh my God, somebody who's talking about firearms without all the hyperbole.

You know, you give me some information and let me make my decisions or, you know, come up with my own idea. So that's how I found you. And it's a nice breath of fresh air for me to be able to get some, you know, disinformation, you know, and that's all that's what I want from any news source. So that's how I found you. And I've been a member ever since.

Stephen Gutowski (13:00.889)

Well, that's wonderful. And yeah, I mean, that's, we try to take that sober, serious approach so people can make up their own minds about these things. You know, I do my best to give my analysis. I do my best not to make it just my opinion of what things should be, but my analysis of what.

Wayne Lerch (13:05.966)

Mm -hmm. Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (13:15.821)

Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (13:19.725)

Mm -hmm. Yeah. Mm -hmm.

Stephen Gutowski (13:20.569)

can be.

Stephen Gutowski (13:25.657)

of that and careful of it but yeah that's what I try to bring. I think Jake does the same thing in his pieces and obviously we've had writers, other writers who've contributed that I think take that same approach so yeah no I'm glad I'm always glad to hear that's what's resonating with with folks and of course super appreciative that you know you've decided to be

Wayne Lerch (13:27.245)

Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (13:33.037)

Yeah.

Wayne Lerch (13:38.765)
Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (13:45.869)
Mm -hmm.

Stephen Gutowski (13:52.729)
a member who supports the work we're doing, because it wouldn't be possible without the paid membership. Like we try to keep a lot of our news stuff free so it can get out to the most people as possible and help inform as many people as possible. But also have that balance of having, you know, member exclusive pieces or perks like this member segment so that you guys get a real value out of your membership as well. And hopefully we're making that balance.

Wayne Lerch (13:55.981)
Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (14:01.709)
Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (14:12.813)
Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (14:21.037)
Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (14:22.457)
enough that it's attractive for people. But yeah, I really appreciate you taking the time to come on and give us a little bit of your backstory. I know everybody is eager to go out in public and talk about stuff like this, especially with how political it can be. So I always appreciate it when members are willing to come on.

Wayne Lerch (14:33.837)
Mm -hmm.

Wayne Lerch (14:41.132)
Yeah. Yeah.

It's funny, I was looking forward to doing this, but there is nothing on my social media, nothing on my card that suggests I have firearms. Because my thing is, if I ever have to use a gun in self -defense, not going what I never do, I don't want a prosecutor going on to my social media and saying, look, he's this fanatic. Yeah. So that night. Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (15:09.273)
Well, I don't think you come off as a fanatic in this interview, so that's good. That's a good thing.

Wayne Lerch (15:13.453)
Well that night I don't want anything on my card that says come break my window. I have something in here you want.

Stephen Gutowski (15:18.713)
Right, right. Absolutely. Of course. Uh, but look, we appreciate you taking a little bit of time and giving us some insight into your personal story and, uh, and some further insight into our, our community here at, at the reload. Um, but, uh, yeah, if anybody else out there wants to join the reload and be, become part of the membership and maybe appear on the show and the number segment like this, they can, uh, you know, head over to the reload .com and pick up.

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guys again real soon.