

Stephen Gutowski (00:04.566)

All right, welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to another episode of the Weekly Reload podcast. I'm your host, Stephen Gutowski, 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, you can also, of course, buy a membership if you want to help support our reporting and get access to hundreds of pieces of analysis that you won't find anywhere else. You also, of course, get this show a day early and the opportunity to appear on the show in the member segment just replied here, exclusive Sunday newsletter that you will also get with the membership. This week on the show, we are going to be talking a little bit about guns and media. And one of the programs that's out there that tries to address some of the issues that are common in reporting on firearms that we see in the news industry. And so to do that, we have with us today T. Becket Adams, who's the director of the National Journalism Center over at Young America's Foundation. Welcome to the show, Becket. Appreciate you coming on.

T. Becket Adams (01:09.294)

Thanks so much for having me. I appreciate it.

Stephen Gutowski (01:13.366)

Yeah, yeah. Can you tell people a little bit more about what NJC is, the National Journalism Center, and a little bit about your own background as well?

T. Becket Adams (01:21.422)

Sure, so kind of the Reader's Digest version, the National Journalism Center was founded in 1977 with a very simple sort of mandate, which was to train journalists in responsible, truth-seeking reporting, no matter what the cost or which party might be affected by it. And even more now than ever, the messages and the mandate of the program is crucial, as I feel in many newsrooms, whether we're talking left or right, specifically, especially on the left.

have moved very sort of hard into these areas where the main thing is whether or not their reporting may hurt the preferred narratives or the preferred party or candidate, et cetera, et cetera. So what we do right now is that we take all kinds and we just train aspiring journalists, young people who want to get into the business. And Stephen, you can probably speak to this as well, but one of the things that they don't tell you a lot about journalism, at least in America, is the amount of gatekeeping that goes on.

It's hard to get in at the ground level. It's hard to just walk in through the front door, especially when you have 600 other people fighting you for the same job position. So one of the things we do is we take all comers, people who want to get in, and we basically help them get through the door. We aren't the gatekeepers. We're happy to help. We're happy to network and introduce people and kind of get them a leg up. And the main thing being that we train them to just be truth-seeking, fearless reporters.

That's really what we focus on. I came to the NJC in 2022, kind of addressing what you were saying specifically about my background. I am currently a three-time columnist. I write every week for the National Review, Washington Examiner, and the Hill Weekly Columnist. Before that, I actually went through the NJC myself in 2010. And I actually, my first gig out of there, they connected me again back to gatekeeping. They immediately connected me to a new site that needed a business reporter. So I did business reporting for a little bit, business editing.

And I moved out to the Washington Examiner in 2014 where I started covering politics. I covered media as a media reporter, not a lot of commentary, not a lot of, you know, opinion straight up, you know, Maggie Haberman moves from Politico to New York Times, just straight up news reporting. And then eventually in 2016, I was assigned to the Clinton campaign, which at the time I wasn't happy with because I thought it would be boring. And boy, was I wrong because there was a lot going on. And one of the huge benefits of that campaign is so few people were paying attention.

Stephen Gutowski (03:39.702)

Yeah.

T. Becket Adams (03:43.63)

It was ripe for the picking for so many scoops in original stories just because everyone was looking the other direction Understandably so and then after 2016 I got into commentary So I do a lot of opinion a lot of writing about what I think is going on because I I feel I have developed a certain expertise in certain areas specifically media criticism and Now here we are in 2024. I train young journalists while writing three columns Some of the columns about media criticism and just some of it generally about social and cultural commentary

Stephen Gutowski (04:10.55)

Yeah, and NJC itself, you know, it's like an internship program, primarily. It's mainly college kids, although I'm sure you, I don't know if it's only college kids. Is it only?

T. Becket Adams (04:15.214)

Yeah.

T. Becket Adams (04:23.726)

No, we accept all types. I mean, it's generally college students. We have, if they apply to people in high school, but that's generally an issue where parents aren't comfortable letting their kids come to DC. It's an in -person internship. So it's in DC. And like you were saying, it is an internship. It's 12 weeks long. We usually get college students. We do get college grads frequently, but everyone's welcome to apply and we take all kinds. But generally it's collegiate folk who are looking to sort of launch their careers immediately after college.

Stephen Gutowski (04:53.206)

Yeah, and they do internships with different publications. I've worked with NJC interns both at the reload for the last several last three years. It's almost our three year anniversary, by the way. And but before that, at the Washington Free Beacon and at CNS News, you know, we had NJC interns that whole time. And so it's a very it's a very good program in my experience. It produces some very good.

writers and reporters. Um, and so I'm, I'm happy to be able to work with you guys, uh, both as somebody who hosts interns and then also on this program we're going to talk about. Cause, uh, so one of the specific things that you guys do, um, is, uh, a firearms program, a firearms reporting program that we've created together, I guess. Um, but that I, I run, um, the training side of it, but, uh, you know, it's the goal is to,

teach the basics of reporting on firearms, try and keep the students away from some of the most common mistakes you see in major media when it comes to firearms reporting, and also give them actual real world experience with gun safety training and using a firearm in person. So tell me a little bit about your decision making process on why you.

agreed to do this this sort of program with me what what you thought it why you thought it was a good idea what it brings to the program in your mind.

T. Becket Adams (06:25.454)

Yeah, so like you were saying, probably the biggest thing that we do on top of the sort of hands -on training that I do as an instructor and my colleague, Elijah Shinskie, that we do as instructors is we do, like you're saying, in -person work placement. We actually put our interns in an actual brick and mortar newsroom around the DC area. Free Beacon being one, Reload, you had one of our interns last summer, although technically that wasn't a brick and mortar, but you get the point. And so one of the first things I did when I came on to NJC in 2022,

is having covered media and done a lot of as a straight news media reporter and then later as a commentator doing media criticism, I came across the same sort of mistakes and the same sort of, like almost trends. Like if it's a story about a certain topic, you can almost be guaranteed that there's gonna be something wrong in it. So I kind of, as a bit of a joke, notice there are three big things that you can almost set your watch to in terms of whether or not if they try to report on it, they will get it wrong.

firearms, faith, and abortion. Those are, in my mind, the three main areas that no matter where you're reading, whether it's the New York Times or USA Today, chances are they're probably gonna get the basics of it wrong because it happens to be, and we can talk about this for hours, but a lot of reporters that sort of corporate, legacy, mainstream,

whatever word you prefer to use, a lot of reporters at some of these larger newsrooms simply just don't know a lot about certain topics, and three being the ones that I listen.

And so when I came into NJC, one of the first things I wanted to do was incorporate this sort of firearm literacy course where we could try to avoid some of the basic, very common mistakes that we see again and again, and Stephen, I know you can speak to this. One of the things I've tried to avoid in my criticism or writing is that you don't want to just nitpick and be like, ha ha, they said clip when they meant magazine. Like that's not the point. The thing where it starts to get frustrating is that you can point these things out a hundred times.

and the editors refuse to learn and refuse to get it right because you see the same problem over and over and over again. So one of the things that I, when we were putting this together, wanted to do was not just sort of beat into their heads this sort of technical language in terms of firearms, but to help them contextualize a lot about firearms, especially the AR -15. So if ever they're going to have to write about gun -related violence or second amendment legislation, you're not completely out of your element trying to write about, I don't even know what an AR is.

T. Becket Adams (08:48.11)

I don't know what an AR looks like, let alone I don't know anything about a bump stock, and yet your editor's asking you to write about some of this stuff. So in terms of, we try to give them just basic literacy, like, hey, here's the difference between fully automatic and semi -automatic. And by the way, you cannot get fully automatic legally in this country, like very basic stuff. And then after that, we actually take them to a range. It's a hundred percent voluntary, of course. If people aren't uncomfortable, we never insist upon it. Then we take them to a range where they can actually...

fire a firearm and many of these students fired for the first time in their lives. They've never even touched a gun, let alone fired one. And so we have, it's funny too, because we get a lot of international students. Like last spring we had a gentleman from China and a gentleman from Italy never have touched a gun in their life. And the Italian was, he had a lot of fun. But he had this moment he was like, I get it. I understand like sports shooting now makes sense to me. This is fun. So.

Stephen Gutowski (09:23.894)

Yeah.

T. Becket Adams (09:41.518)

The idea isn't just trying to convert them and make people huge Second Amendment fans or huge gun nuts. The idea is if you're gonna write about an AR, maybe it'd be useful if at some point you've held one, you've heard one, you can now kind of contextualize in your head what people are talking about when they talk about, say, shooting experience, shooting events, et cetera, et cetera, or the legislation, the technicalities of the AR. And I kind of used this analogy before in the past, but imagining being a reporter and you now are gonna have to cover a basketball game.

You can have someone describe to you how a basketball game works, but it might be useful at some point for you to sit down and actually watch a basketball game. So that's kind of the approach that we have taken. And I think it's been, or even playing it, right? At the very least, you can watch it, just something, try to familiarize yourself. And so that's what we've been trying to do. This is just one of those blocks of like, here's an area where media frequently gets it wrong. Let's try to correct that one young aspiring journalist at a time.

Stephen Gutowski (10:16.182)

Yeah, we're playing it, right?

Stephen Gutowski (10:34.742)

Yeah, yeah. And I think that captures the core of what we're, what we're trying to do in these classes. And we just had one last Friday as a, you know, I said, I mentioned on the podcast, I was going to go do this. And, and so I figured it'd be a good time to get it. We've been doing this for a little while now, and I know it interests a lot of people who subscribe to reload. And so I want to get people a little bit deeper insight into how this works and why we're doing it. And I think you captured the real core of what I think is most important in these.

these range trips and the classroom portion is like, it's not so much about teaching terminology, although that's part of it, right? Obviously we wanna make sure they understand the difference between semi-automatic and fully automatic and try to get some of these very common mistakes that you see repeated over and over again and try to explain the different sticking points in a lot of...

T. Becket Adams (11:11.15)

Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (11:32.438)

current gun issues that people are gonna run into if they're covering this topic for a newspaper somewhere, things like how the background check system actually works, what people mean by the gun show loophole, what that actually means and the critiques of it and so on and so forth. Trying to give them a better...

grasp on some of these basic things that are likely to come across, you know, assault weapons versus assault rifle, or what the definition of an assault weapon is, and how that varies from state to state. And, you know, a lot of these things that you will hear come up very frequently if you're writing about guns. And I do think that one of the big problems, and I think we will get into this a little bit later on sort of when we talk about media generally, but one of the big problems is that,

T. Becket Adams (11:57.358)

Thank you.

T. Becket Adams (12:03.054)

So, it's very famous.

Stephen Gutowski (12:23.99)

you get a lot of general interest reporters who report on guns because not a lot of outlets actually have a beat reporter that focuses on this topic. And that leads to most of these kinds of problems because the reporters not only have never had training like that, like what we're, what you guys are providing at NJC and what I'm helping you with, but, but also I've never spent much time writing about the issue before. Like it's something that gets worked out through beat reporting. Like you usually become more knowledgeable about a subject, the more you write about it. But if you don't have,

T. Becket Adams (12:39.182)

Right.

Stephen Gutowski (12:53.782)

The industry doesn't have a focus on this topic as a serious, uh, most of the industry doesn't have a, uh, focus on this topic as like a serious subject that they want to dedicate resources to. And so, you know, that, that becomes a big problem, but one way to combat that, I think the primary way to combat these things is through teaching information, you know, providing them information and providing it on a more holistic level than just.

AR doesn't stand for assault rifle or magazines clips are different from magazines or you know, that sort of thing that like you said, that's it's easy to point out as almost a gotcha thing. Like yes, reporters should know that if they're writing about something, but also it's not the biggest, it's more important that they understand the fundamental issues at play.

T. Becket Adams (13:38.766)

Right. It's crazy to me that more, like you were saying, more newsrooms don't dedicate at least some resources to getting their reporters generally versed in this. Cause that's the thing, like I was saying, like when we do Rage Day, I don't expect them to come away loving it and being big second amendment nuts. I don't care. I just want them to know what they're talking about when they write about it. That's all I'm asking. And the fact that we have to design and sort of invent something like this because nothing like this exists for, and like it's...

Stephen Gutowski (13:55.862)

Not to go.

T. Becket Adams (14:07.502)

The reason it's crazy to me is how often the firearms, the second amendment, the stuff is in the news. It's every four years, especially for presidential elections, hot topic issue. And yet Newsroom spend the bare minimum of even that training the reports to understand what they're writing about, even though they're going to write about this stuff all the time. And to me, it's crazy. It's a blind spot that makes you wonder at what point is it willful or is it just plain laziness? And the reason being it's there, it exists. So that's why.

Stephen Gutowski (14:24.886)

Yeah.

T. Becket Adams (14:36.494)

One of the first things I did when I came on to NJC here was call you up and let's talk about how when we have these classes come through. So just real quick, we have two sessions per year, one in the spring and summer. Every year we have two sessions come through. Sometimes classes are, no, there's 10 students, sometimes there's 30 students. But the idea is every time every fresh one comes in, they have to have some basic literacy in this issue they will almost certainly write about at some point in their careers.

Stephen Gutowski (15:00.502)

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I totally agree with you. I mean, I just think it's something where, uh, dedicating some time and resources to understanding. I mean, look, if you're reporting, you should try to dedicate some time and resources to whatever you're going to be writing about. That's your responsibility as a, as a reporter. You need to know about these things. If you're trying to inform your audience, if you don't know anything about the topic, then your audience is going to be even more clueless when you get a red piece. Uh, you know, that's why, you know, obviously there's, you don't have to become an expert.

you can cite experts and hopefully you'll do it in a way that's ideally you want to try and be fair to everybody in the story and give a breadth of views on the topic. But yeah, I mean, it's just one of those things where I and I talk about this in class, like sure, there's a is there an ideological bent in major media? I think you could say there is right. But and some of that comes to play in any issue, including with guns.

T. Becket Adams (15:29.614)

You're like.

T. Becket Adams (15:49.102)

Thank you.

T. Becket Adams (15:56.302)

Right. I think so.

Stephen Gutowski (15:59.542)

A lot of major outlets tend to have left-leaning people in them. I mean, they had the NPR editor who just wrote about his, the DC office has 87 Democrats and zero Republicans. Like, you know, there's, it exists. I don't think it's, I think it's clear to see, but I don't think it's what actually drives most of the issues that we see in reporting on firearms. I honestly think it has much more to do with a lack of knowledge.

T. Becket Adams (16:15.918)

Thank you.

T. Becket Adams (16:23.502)

We have two things.

Stephen Gutowski (16:28.118)

than it does with some sort of attempt by reporters to manipulate stories to favor their ideology. Like I just think for your, especially for your average like beat reporter, your average print reporter who's writing a story, I don't think that's their goal. If they, if they're doing this professionally, I think it's much more ignorance, like just lack of knowledge and which is one addressable. It's not, it's still, I mean, they should know better. You know, to be fair, but.

T. Becket Adams (16:39.278)

Thank you.

T. Becket Adams (16:57.294)

Right, and this points to a much larger issue, which is I think a lot of reporters, and you probably know this from experience, write with a certain amount of, what's the word I'm looking, they write with a certain amount of at ease because they know like, look, if I mess something up, my editor at least, or the web producer is probably gonna catch it. And these stories just get printed, the editor doesn't catch it, the web producers don't catch it. It goes through layers and nobody catches it. So that speaks to actually a larger issue in the newsroom, which is.

Stephen Gutowski (17:13.91)

Mm -hmm.

T. Becket Adams (17:24.43)

And I think a lot of reporters do have this where they're like, I'm writing this and I think I got it right. This is how I framed it. And I think some reporters, especially the longer they're in, they slip into this habit where like, well, if my editor didn't catch it, then I assume I got it right. Which is not a great assumption to ever make. But it points to the issue that you see the stuff that gets to print. You're like, how many, like at the New York Times, like this went through at least three layers and nobody caught it. So we got to start at the bottom and just start.

Stephen Gutowski (17:36.022)

Good day.

Stephen Gutowski (17:46.582)

Yeah.

T. Becket Adams (17:51.502)

You can't rely on the editors or, again, the web producers to back you up. You can make a huge error, especially if you're making these errors over and over again, where that's when it starts getting really frustrating.

Stephen Gutowski (17:58.102)

Yeah, and I definitely think it's more of an industry problem than it is like an individual newsroom or individual reporter issue. It's something where the industry does not value this knowledge that much, honestly. I think CNN has been a little bit better than others on this point by at least trying to...

to go out and find people who are knowledgeable, but even if they come from different perspectives, it's really, to me, it's not so much about your ideological perspective on guns that's as much of an issue, that can be an issue, obviously, but it's, again, it's just lack of understanding of the basics of the, of everything about firearms, not just how the firearms function themselves. This is something that's, I think, unique to our class too, is like, it's not just about, oh, here's how you're, the gun.

T. Becket Adams (18:39.694)

And this is something that fits, I think, unique to our class too.

Stephen Gutowski (18:46.102)

policy works, right? Here's how background checks work. Here's how that law works. It also is about handling a firearm. Here's how you should properly handle a firearm and shoot it safely, right? That's another aspect. Here's gun culture. Here's, actually, especially with the international students that come in, we tend to spend a lot of time talking about gun culture in America and why it's unique.

T. Becket Adams (18:48.238)

All secrets.

T. Becket Adams (18:59.374)

Thank you.

Thank you.

T. Becket Adams (19:10.926)

All right.

T. Becket Adams (19:15.47)

Right, because they come over understandably with many questions because to them it's completely, not just a, I mean, no pun, not just a foreign concept, but to some of them it seems insane, it seems crazy to them. And so you get to have this chance to sort of like explain, you know, the culture behind, gun culture, not to be redundant, the perspective, the culture, and you get to have this chance. And some of the students are like, okay, well thank you for explaining, I now understand it, I still think it's a little insane, but I know it doesn't seem like it. Right.

Stephen Gutowski (19:31.286)

Yeah, the perspective.

Stephen Gutowski (19:40.182)

Yeah, but it's not about, right. And it's not about them. It's not, it's, we're not there to convince them one way or the other. Yeah. And, and often, right. And often they, they kind of want me to tell them my opinions on, on different topics. And that's understandable. But you know, I'm there.

T. Becket Adams (19:46.702)

Right. I just want them to know what they're talking about. That's all I care about.

T. Becket Adams (20:02.382)

I feel like every session the student asks you, like, so what's your plan to stop mass shootings? Like that happens every class. And it's like, well, if we had the answer to that, we'd probably be very wealthy men.

Stephen Gutowski (20:05.91)

Right, right. Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (20:11.798)

Well, it's just like, there are lots of different perspectives on here's, and I tried my best to represent what, you know, either side would argue on. Like I try to explain the positions at play, cause that's what's going to be, it's not so much as a reporter, what your opinion on X topic is. It's more about being able to, you know, represent fairly what each side is saying. Now, you know, you want to obviously,

at a certain point, you have to report the facts of what's happening. But I think it's important to acknowledge that people can look at the same set of facts and have very different opinions on what to do from that point. And it's best to try and give people those opinions from either side and try to do them in a way that's fair and representative of what the side each side believes on the topic. Right. And that's that's more what I try to get across with.

what I'm teaching this class is like not so much what I think we should do to reduce gun violence. I mean, certainly I've listened to the arguments and have my own personal opinions one way or the other, but I think it's more important to give my readers what different sides are arguing, what they think, and then people can make up their own minds the way that I would.

T. Becket Adams (21:31.662)

Well, I feel like that has led to some frustration on my part that I've had to try to check the feeling that I put in more effort trying to understand, say, every town's positions and I can recite them backwards and forwards. And I don't feel that level of commitment is a two-way street. I feel like there's a lot, because I see common mistakes and not just mistakes, but also just falsehoods pushed by a lot of different activist groups. And it's like, I don't feel like he actually took the time to sit down.

Stephen Gutowski (21:43.126)

Hmm.

T. Becket Adams (22:00.462)

and you just know there's something you don't like and you want it to change. And that's fine, I get that, but if we're gonna have a reasonable, and not just even reasonable, but a productive back and forth, or even a negotiation, like you gotta know what you're talking about. It's as simple as that. And so we go back to the newsrooms, like I can speculate all day long about why more effort isn't made to make sure reporters, not even the entire newsroom, but at least the people who cover this stuff aren't better equipped to deal with, to talk about it.

I don't know if it's cultural. Like, look, they've never been in golden culture. To them, maybe it's embarrassing, so they never bothered to learn about any of this stuff. There's over-reliance on experts say, but as you and I both know a lot, experts actually don't know what they're talking about. It's usually someone who's like, I used to be an ex-branch of the military, and I think. He's like, okay, yeah. But then, you have these moments where that's fine, you try to learn the arguments, but you also try to present them. So when I would report on these issues, whenever I would report...

Actually, this happened a lot when I was at the examiner. People would come to me, they'd be like, you're the gun guy. I'm like, well, I'm not an expert or anything. And they're like, I actually don't know anything about rifles. Is what I wrote correct? And I'm looking over and they're like, well, actually, technically, no, it's just, there you go. Fantastic. And then they would never ask again, because they learned after that first time. I'm like, fine. But like, I get people aren't in the culture. I get that. What I don't understand is how newsrooms can kind of continue along, because maybe it's, like I was saying, it's embarrassing. They think it's like beneath them, maybe like redneck culture, whatever. I don't know that that's all.

Stephen Gutowski (23:05.206)

Yeah.

T. Becket Adams (23:23.054)

pure speculation. The point is it hurts their reporting. People won't trust them because maybe they don't put an emphasis on it, but there are millions of people out there who know what they're talking about when it comes to this and they see you saying something like chainsaw bayonets, they're never going to take your reporting seriously after that. It just becomes a gag so I don't understand. It's self-defeating. Why not put in just a little bit of energy into making sure you don't clown yourself?

Stephen Gutowski (23:43.062)

Yeah. And this is what we start off with the class with, right? What's the problem? Like trying to identify a problem for these students of like, why does this even matter? Why should you care? And the problem is that if you make the, if you make significant mistakes in your reporting, uh, you know, maybe your colleagues don't recognize that it's a mistake is they're also not well informed on the issue, but some section of your readership is going to know, and they're going to stop taking you seriously. And, and it's a, and, and at this level,

T. Becket Adams (24:10.926)

Thank you.

Stephen Gutowski (24:12.662)

with you know after years of this happening across the board you get to the point where Wide swaths of the country don't take the industry seriously on firearms anymore, and that's a big problem.



T. Becket Adams (24:25.262)

Right. And they certainly are not going to take your reporting and they're certainly not going to take your commentary seriously. So you can write the angriest, most impassioned piece you want on gun reform, but you get basic stuff wrong. Everyone's just kind of laughing you out of the room and just be like, you're writing from feelings. You don't actually know what you're talking about. And it's funny because I'm not, there's like two separate cultures that remind me of each other. Car, like classic car culture and gun culture are very similar in how its members sort of,

behave. I'm not explicitly in either one. The point being, if you get something wrong, they will let you know very fast. You don't know what you're talking about and they will correct you and they will give you the right information. So, gun culture in the United States, broadly speaking, there are people who actually just know and understand the basics of firearms and that's a lot of people. And they come across your reporting and it's clear you don't know what you're talking about. The next obvious question for them is, why am I reading this? Why should I continue reading this?

if not to just make fun of it. So it's like your reporting won't be taken seriously, your commentary certainly won't be taken seriously. So if it is that your purpose is to achieve some level of stricter gun legislation, well how are you gonna do that when you're being laughed out of the room every time you open your mouth? So that's why I don't, is it laziness, is it ignorance, is it hubris? I don't know, all I know is it exists and that's one thing that you and I at least are trying to change one semester at a time.

Stephen Gutowski (25:48.982)

Yeah, certainly. I mean, these are small classes, so it's not, you know, we're not, it's not hundreds of people.

T. Becket Adams (25:56.334)

Anything bigger than zero is bigger than zero.

Stephen Gutowski (25:57.59)

I absolutely agree and I do feel like the students come away from these classes and you'll know a little bit better than I do because you continue to interact with them after and I'm not with them every week like you are. But I feel like they do actually learn a significant amount from this course and at least from the handling of the firearms that can usually be somewhat revelatory for a number of these students.

and it gives them, especially because some things like, for instance, silencers or suppressors, right? We often will have a suppressor demonstration as part of our range trip so that people can have, like, because there's a very well-ingrained popular culture view of what a silencer does or suppressor does. Yeah, and in real life, that's not actually how they work. And so it can be, but they do have a legitimate.

T. Becket Adams (26:47.598)

It's the plaintiff noise, you know.

Stephen Gutowski (26:54.71)

substantial effect is just not movie style assassin effect or John wick chapter two where they're shooting in the train station and no one notices. Yeah, that's not how you would know that people are shooting at each other. Trust me. That's that's not how suppressors work in real life. That's why people yell at you if you call them silencers instead of suppressors because they don't actually sense. Yeah.

T. Becket Adams (27:04.494)

Just walking in and nobody notices.

T. Becket Adams (27:11.118)

You know very fast.

Stephen Gutowski (27:19.542)

As I explained to some of the students, I have a different view on this than some gun rights aggrist, because the guy who invented them called them silencers. His company was called Silencer Co. The ATF also calls them silencers under the



Although that does get into one of the other things that I start off the class with is like, yes, one of the issues that journalists face is a lack of credibility on this topic because of continuous mistakes, often of the same.

T. Becket Adams (29:42.542)

Yeah, it wasn't even plain ignorance, it was just plain dishonesty. That's a different vice altogether.

Stephen Gutowski (29:59.734)

basic kind, right? Like semi -automatic versus fully automatic is a pretty huge distinction that people don't understand often in newsrooms, which is that really gets at the level of ignorance involved. But because anyone who owns a firearm or has shot firearms should have a pretty good grasp on the difference between semi -automatic and fully automatic. They're quite different. But.

T. Becket Adams (30:24.558)

Right, you know if you know. It's one of those situations. So we get into an issue where you're saying systemic. You wonder if it's, not just plain ignorance, but there's a, I mean, we could talk for hours about this, but I'll just say very briefly, there's also, in terms of a lack of general knowledge, there's also a lack of transparency and accountability for when they do get it wrong. And they do have it pointed out, and instead of saying, hey, we got that wrong, we'll do better, it's very often to not even acknowledge it, and to sometimes not even print, or.

Stephen Gutowski (30:50.55)

Yeah.

T. Becket Adams (30:52.206)

correction or an editor's note. They just let it stay. Like so very briefly with the Katie Kirk thing, she was dead to rights. She selectively edited, she was dishonest and rather than apologize or anything, her and her producers came out and we did it, this is work we're proud of, et cetera, et cetera. So it's like, it's a lack of ability to learn, but also a total lack of humility that goes off in hand in hand with the bad reporting.

Stephen Gutowski (31:11.286)

Yeah, and in her case as well, the producers on that documentary, this is a documentary called, I believe it was Guns Down, something like that. She did a series of documentaries and there were actually issues with the other food -based documentaries she did before that, similar issues. I broke all these doors, by the way, back in the day. And then I can give you another recent example, too, Politico.

T. Becket Adams (31:21.198)

I don't even remember what's called. It was a while ago.

T. Becket Adams (31:34.83)

All right, I remember.

Stephen Gutowski (31:40.15)

was reporting on the Undetectable Firearms Act getting renewed as part of one of the recent legislative packages that was passed because it would have expired otherwise. And they reported on it as a ghost gun ban or a ban on un -serialized firearms being passed. But they're two completely separate policies that don't do.

even close to the same thing. Renewing the Undetectable Firearms Act just keeps the status quo the way it is, because that has been around for long. That's about, basically it's a law from really, I believe from the 80s that was about making sure that there's enough metal in a gun for it to set off a metal detector. That's what that law does. And then, you know, banning un -serialized guns, well, that would be a radical departure from current policy.

T. Becket Adams (32:13.774)

Mm -hmm. I was just gonna say.

Stephen Gutowski (32:35.414)

Um, it would basically ban all homemade firearms, um, and isn't something that exists at the, I mean, there's proposals for it. Some States have done this, but you get the idea there. They're completely different policies and Politico had reported on the, this win for Democrats by having this ghost gun ban put in. And I, which, which like surprised me. Cause I was like, wait, what there's, what happened? There's some brand new gun bill got passed that I was.

T. Becket Adams (32:39.758)

Thank you.

T. Becket Adams (32:51.15)

Right.

T. Becket Adams (33:01.134)

Thank you.

Stephen Gutowski (33:04.502)

never no one talked about until right now. And I thought that they had probably made this mistake, but they hadn't. This is another classic reporter thing where you don't actually link back to like the text of something that happens way too often in our industry court court rulings or the text of bills and stuff like Jesus, just give me a link so I can go and read it. I want to make sure you're what you're saying is right. Um,

T. Becket Adams (33:21.582)

That's so annoying.

T. Becket Adams (33:28.75)

Thank you.

Stephen Gutowski (33:31.51)

we linked to all that stuff in our reports. It's a big emphasis of mine. But regardless, so I tracked this down through my own sources and yeah, figured out, oh no, they're talking about the Undetectable Firearms Act, not a ghost gun ban or something of that nature, an un -serialized gun ban, right? And like I told, I repeatedly tweeted at them about this and no one ever responded or changed anything.

T. Becket Adams (33:31.598)

I'd like to see the source material. It's very simple.

Stephen Gutowski (33:58.646)

And I believe if you still go, you go look, they just have the wrong information.

T. Becket Adams (34:03.118)

The language of the report never got amended?

Stephen Gutowski (34:05.398)

Yeah, as far as I know. They never changed anything or responded.

T. Becket Adams (34:13.358)

And now political readers are worse off for a single report. So it's like, again, it happens. I know people know and hear this. I don't understand why there's not a bigger change to get it right.

Stephen Gutowski (34:14.838)

Yeah.

Stephen Gutowski (34:23.894)

And I'll say too that going back to Katie Kirk example, this isn't just like about credibility either. It can be legal issues that you run into if you don't know what you're doing when you're reporting on firearms. Cause the, another thing that

Katie Kirk producers did on that documentary is that they cross state lines to buy handguns from private sellers to show that it was like,

T. Becket Adams (34:35.598)  
Right.

Stephen Gutowski (34:51.798)  
They were trying, this is a common thing that happens. This happens every couple of years. A reporter will go out and try to show that the gun laws are too loose essentially. And what they actually end up doing is breaking them and committing felonies. I think the most famous example of this and one that I also use is David Gregory, meet the press when he was interviewing Wayne LaPierre after the Sandy Hook shooting. He pulled out a 30 round magazine like this, like I'm doing right now here.

T. Becket Adams (35:02.51)  
Right.

T. Becket Adams (35:06.414)  
Okay.

Stephen Gutowski (35:21.334)  
He said, why should these be legal? The difference between me doing it right now and when he did it is that right now I'm in Virginia where these are currently legal. And he was in Washington, DC where they were not legal to possess. Sorry, I dropped my magazine. But, and yeah, so that's a crime that he committed live on national television that there was actually a police affidavit written up for his arrest.

T. Becket Adams (35:23.726)  
right in the field.

Stephen Gutowski (35:49.014)  
Now, he never was arrested. And this is also a common thing that happens in these cases. Reporters are often given leniency for accidentally breaking laws. There was one that I had reported on as well, in addition to the Kirk one, where a CBS reporter, they were trying to show that it's easy for somebody without a, like a normal person, the CBS reporter who doesn't have a criminal record, apparently, or any sort of disqualifying records.

T. Becket Adams (35:54.944)  
Thank you.

T. Becket Adams (36:00.142)  
Right.

T. Becket Adams (36:11.246)  
Finish the video.

Stephen Gutowski (36:18.646)  
to own a gun. They were trying to show that it was easy to go in and buy the gun and leave the same day for an AR -15. They did this in Alexandria, Virginia, which at a local, one of my local gun stores at the time. But for some reason, they did this undercover and they didn't tell the gun store what they were doing. And so they lied to the gun store. They lied to the licensed dealer about why they were buying this gun and who it was really for. Cause at the end of the report, they're like, oh, the,

She didn't keep this gun. She gave it away and had it disposed of by a third party, which, you know, is a straw purchase. That's like the, it wasn't actually for her. She wasn't the actual buyer. And that's a huge problem. And she got reported the ATF for that after I asked the gun store about what had happened. And so there's like, yes, there's credibility issue with not having base level information about firearms when you're going to report on them. There's also like a legal

issue. If you,

T. Becket Adams (37:07.822)

Good. Yes, we do.

Stephen Gutowski (37:17.526)

You might like reporters have continually broken the law because they don't understand it when they go to do these.

T. Becket Adams (37:27.598)

Right. And it also has a knock on effect in terms of like you were saying credibility and trust. They're like, well, who, who are you writing for? Who are you reporting for? You're reporting for the public. You're doing for the public interest. And you probably wouldn't be surprised at all. So when we do range day at the NJC, we work with a couple of different, we've worked now with three different ranges and every single time I contact them kind of out of the blue, introduce myself and explain to them that I want to bring a group of journalists to their range every single time they kind of.

Stephen Gutowski (37:55.382)

Yep.

T. Becket Adams (37:56.686)

back away slowly and there's a very sort of clear, are you trying to screw me? You're trying to screw me right now, aren't you? And I'm like, that's the thing, I don't blame him. There's no part of me was like, hey man, I was like, you know, I get it. I 100 % get it. You have been trained at this point to expect that if a reporter comes calling, you think I'm trying to screw you. And in fact, one of them, we'll just speak of them anonymously. One of the ranges, they kind of confided in me. Every time there's a major shooting in the DMV area for your viewers.

Stephen Gutowski (37:58.646)

And that CBS report gives you an example of why people feel that way.

T. Becket Adams (38:25.39)

DMV area being the district, Maryland and Virginia. Every time there's a major shooting, reporters come to them and ask, did you sell the gun? Did you sell the ammo? Every single time. And they're like, we had nothing to do with this, but we're asked it every single time. So yes, when you call us and say you want to bring 20 journalists onto our shooting range, I don't think so. But no, none of them have ever barred us, luckily. I've always explained exactly what we're trying to do. And every single one we've paired with has been fantastic. I've been very pleased.

Stephen Gutowski (38:50.582)

Yeah, yeah. You know, I think, but that's something you have to do to build trust with any, anyone in the firearms industry when you're trying to report on because, because there is a very negative association with the industry, um, between, you know, the firearms industry and the news industry. And often because, you know, a lot of reporters treat them as a adversarial off the bat. Um, you know, not everyone in the firearms industry is a good guy, right? Uh, like I'm not saying that, but you shouldn't go in necessarily with this attitude of like,

T. Becket Adams (39:19.982)

That's it.

Stephen Gutowski (39:20.854)

they're doing that. Think back to that CBS report. Like what are you even trying to show in there? But that's what didn't make a lot of sense to me.

T. Becket Adams (39:28.686)

Right. It's like those weird viral videos you see every now and then of people just kind of harassing, you know, like fast food workers and like, what are you trying to prove? Right. That's guys just doing his job. He's not doing anything wrong. Like you have a beef with something bigger than this person who's just doing their job and like just living their

life. And like I remember seeing that I was like that CBS reporters like the takeaway is I a law abiding citizen can legally purchase a firearm in America. I was like, yeah, okay. You can also buy a car if you'd like.

Stephen Gutowski (39:52.374)

did system. You can do it quickly. It was sort of the point of the report, I guess, is what I was trying to take what I seem to be getting across. But that's the whole point of the system. It's supposed to be instant. That's why the name has instant.

T. Becket Adams (39:58.382)

Thank you.

What was it?

T. Becket Adams (40:07.374)

And this is to the larger point that to them, this was all news. The news was news to the news men, which is, I mean, try untangling that. That's a little bit of Joseph Heller right there. But the fact that they didn't know this, that's actually an indictment on your industry right now. You're not proving anything to the readers. All you're proving is your own ignorance, which sure, if you want to do that, but not in the news industry. The one thing you need is credibility and trust. And if you throw it away story after story and then refuse to learn from the same mistakes, you have no one to blame for yourself. You can get mad.

Stephen Gutowski (40:12.726)

Exactly.

T. Becket Adams (40:36.59)

The people are flocking to Joe Rogan for their news, but you know they're leaving for a reason. It's not completely in a vacuum.

Stephen Gutowski (40:38.454)

Yeah. Yeah. I think that's a fair criticism. I just.

You know, it's unfortunate. And to do it the way they did it undercover, like why you could have, if their point was you can buy the, this is all perfectly legal to do. And you can walk out with a gun quickly because the background check came back fast. Um, and, and some people want waiting periods or something like there's obviously debates. You can legitimate discussions of policy that exists.

There are people on either side that have different points of view and you can explain all that if you know what you're talking about, right? You'd be a much better story that way. If you actually knew what you're talking about, you could get people who are representative of either side or of these different positions on how this gun buying should work in America or whatever. You'd end up with a much better story that doesn't have the ATF called on you. And who knows what happened after that. I, they,

didn't send her to jail as far as I'm aware, but I'm sure it wasn't a pleasant experience for this reporter. And yeah, I mean, this is, so this is the other half of it is like, you want to learn these things because you want to be credible for your audience and you don't want to misinform them. But also like gun laws are serious. And if you violate them, you might end up having to go down to talk to ATF agents about why you did something so dumb.

T. Becket Adams (41:34.734)

Right.

T. Becket Adams (42:02.67)

Right, and then you accidentally prove the opposite of your point, which is, it's too easy to do this. I'm like, no, they take this stuff pretty seriously. Which is kind of contra the entire, no narrative that gets pushed with that, like that CBS story.

Stephen Gutowski (42:09.174)

So what, you know, as far as things stand today, you know, you're, you're, uh, somebody running a program where you're trying to bring up the next generation of reporters here and trying to give them a good start into the industry. Where do you, um, where do you see this all going? Which, what, what are you hoping for to come out of, you know, this, this range day program we're doing? Um, what, what's your view of the future here?

T. Becket Adams (42:40.878)

I mean, I feel like I'm almost bipolar and that I have good days and bad days in terms of like, you know, this industry is, you know, we're gonna put it back together, it's on the upswing. And then there's some days where it's like, you know, a lot of this feels pretty irreparable. Like it's just a mess. Especially after reading like that NPR report, just about how entrenched certain sort of, how political activists tend to join journalism more and more in numbers, where at least people feel more emboldened to get into political activism while being a rep.

reporter. Where do I see this going? Like if there is going to be any sort of long term effect from what I'm doing, I probably won't be alive for it. Uh, but the idea is just one person at a time. Just if I can get, you know, uh, two classes every year, just a little more familiar with this topic that that can actually have a knock on effect where I look, maybe the editors at the post or the times don't know anything about this, but this one person on the desk doesn't know something about it and they can catch it before it goes to print. You can actually have effective.

Trustworthy credible news reporting so you know the idea being that the party is better informed We can actually have informed debates about these things going forward so you're not just you know You have David Hogg screaming something completely unintelligible about bump stocks at Wayne LaPierre and like nothing nothing's happening It's just people yelling and fundraising off of each other and meanwhile people like me who just want to be left alone and have a second amendment sort of Protected and respected that's all kind of just fodder in a larger cultural war battle. What I want is for informed

reporters so we can get more away from the sort of culture war side of things and get towards legislating reasonably and realistically to sort of address some of these issues. If that doesn't sound too vague, but that's what I got.

Stephen Gutowski (44:16.598)

No, no, that's great. And yeah, and I think if we could have more people just learning basics, I mean, I will say in my experience with a lot of major media reporters from the largest outlets out there, I do get, I have traditionally gotten a lot of questions from them trying, where they're trying to make sure that they're accurate on it. This is obviously I'm one person and you're one person and we can't be the...

the ombudsman on guns for the entire industry or whatever it's not realistic but yeah.

from every outlet, you know, and all the major outlets across the board, Times, the Post, the NBC, you know, wherever. And obviously CNN has hired me to be a contributor and I do also help whenever there's questions on stories there. Yeah, but again, so there is that desire, I think, I still feel among your beat reporters, your print reporters, your folks gathering news.

T. Becket Adams (44:54.446)

That's a good sign though, you have people just like, hey look, I don't wanna make a fool of myself so can you just... That's fantastic.

Stephen Gutowski (45:19.446)

to try and get things right as much as they possibly can. They don't want to misinform their audience. It's just a lack of knowledge usually is the problem or a lack of variety in sourcing is another issue too, right? Like they hear from one side and not the other so much, or they hear from the reasonable representatives of one side and the crazy representatives of another. You know what I mean? Like there's, you gotta search out and try and find people to source from too, to try and get.

T. Becket Adams (45:29.294)



Right.

Stephen Gutowski (45:47.318)

representative views so that you can inform your audience again. But it all goes down to that at the end of the day. You don't want to try and manipulate your audience. You want to try and inform them. You don't want to misinform them. That should be your goals as a journalist.

T. Becket Adams (46:03.278)

Right, like what I was saying is like don't attribute malice to that which can be explained by plain ignorance. I don't think many reporters are actively trying to get their reporting wrong. I think a lot of it's just plain ignorance and part of what I hope to accomplish pairing up with you is we can start sending off to newsrooms across the country just one at a time with each new class. Somebody, at least somebody on the news desk will actually know, hey by the way, no, you can't buy a fully automatic AR -15. And AR doesn't mean assault rifle, just very basic stuff.

Stephen Gutowski (46:26.774)

Right. Well, you can buy them. They're just super expensive. Um, yeah, there is a very, yes. 30, \$30,000, whatever. Anyway, um, really appreciate you coming on and give us, giving us some insight into NJC and into being here to have this conversation about the program that we're running and, you know, maybe people outside of, of NJC will start to adopt the same sort of training and standards.

T. Becket Adams (46:32.654)

Very basically, we start there and we can build up. Yeah, you can, but good luck, you have to take out a mortgage on your house.

T. Becket Adams (46:43.246)

You're right.

Stephen Gutowski (46:56.566)

to try and bring a bit more knowledge. I've had, I mean, I've taken reporters from the Atlantic to the range for when they were gonna go work on, like it's not, this isn't something where nobody is interested in this stuff. It's just something that goes beyond teaching one or two reporters here or there. It's an industry -wide issue that needs a more significant response. And I think the first step is what we're doing at NJC. At least we've got some formalized program and hopefully we'll see more of the industry try and

and come up with something similar or adopt our model, I'd be more than happy to share. But yeah, if people are interested in NJC and want to find out more about it, where should they go?

T. Becket Adams (47:36.942)

be fine with me.

T. Becket Adams (47:42.318)

very simple, it's just njc .com. You can go there, you can apply if you're interested, or if you're interested in learning more about it, you can email me directly, it's just B as in boy, adams at yaf, y -a -f dot org. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Stephen Gutowski (47:51.542)

All right, fantastic. If you were interested in learning more about the Reload and buying a membership, you can head over to therelive .com and do that today. You will of course get access to hundreds of pieces of analysis that you will not find anywhere else in the world on the internet or what have you. You'll also get access to this podcast today early and the opportunity to appear on the show in a member segment. Just respond to your Sunday newsletter that you get as a member. This is another exclusive, of course.

And obviously, your dues go to making sure we can even do any of this. Without reload members, the reload would not exist. And so I really appreciate the support that you give. But it's not just a cherry thing. You also get lots of benefit. So

that's all I've got for you guys this week. We will see you again real soon.