

00:00;19;23 - 00:00;47;16

Stephen Gutowski

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 thereload.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 from a sober, serious perspective. This week we are once again talking about the NRA and one of its, lessons, another new mess that they're embroiled in.

00:00;47;18 - 00:00;59;29

Stephen Gutowski

And so to do that, we have somebody who knows the NRA very well and who can also give us a good, I think, honest perspective on everything going on. And that's Cam Edwards from Bearing Arms. Welcome back to the show, Cam.

00:01;00;03 - 00:01;02;26

Cam Edwards

Always appreciate the invite. Steven, good to see you again.

00:01;02;29 - 00:01;23;15

Stephen Gutowski

Yes. I mean, I'm sure you didn't planned and want to come on to talk about this particular story because it's not a fun one. It's pretty gruesome, to be fair for. So, like, I don't know, you might want to skip through the beginning part here when we describe the actual accusations of animal cruelty that are involved in this story.

00:01;23;15 - 00:01;46;02

Stephen Gutowski

But, but I do appreciate you coming on to, you know, for those listening, I'm going to skip some of this at the beginning because it's pretty, pretty, graphic stuff. But, but I do appreciate you coming on to kind of, try and weigh what this all means for the NRA for the 2024 election and so forth.

00:01;46;04 - 00:02;27;09

Stephen Gutowski

But I guess from that, well, it's just I'll just describe what the story is. Right. So, on Monday, The Guardian published a report about the new CEO and executive vice president of the NRA, Doug Hamlin, and his involvement in an animal cruelty incident when he was in college. He pled no contest to, a misdemeanor charge of animal cruelty, alongside four other, men who were allegedly involved with the torture and killing of a house cat in their fraternity.

00:02;27;12 - 00:03;01;08

Stephen Gutowski

They were expelled from the fraternity. And Hamlin was also part of a suit. He was in a lawsuit from the former cook of that, frat house where it was alleged that Hamlin, after the fact, tried to, and threaten the cook and do not talking to police, about the, killing of the cat and and the accusation of how they killed the cat was also quite disturbing.

00:03;01;08 - 00:03;31;07

Stephen Gutowski

And they cut off its paws, strung it up by a tree, and set it on fire. So, there is, the Hamlin himself has said he did not have direct involvement in the actual mutilation of the cat. And that his responsibility more stemmed from his role as president of the fraternity at the time. However, the judge in the case also singled out Hamlin Hamlin during sentencing and said he could have stopped the incident but didn't.

00:03;31;10 - 00:04;00;29

Stephen Gutowski

So, yeah, that's that's what we're talking about. That's the story here. Now, this did happen in 1979. So it was quite a while ago, 44 years. And Hamlin has said that, you know, he he went on, he shouldn't necessarily be judged by this one

incident. He went on to live, an upstanding life serving the military has been working at the NRA for the last ten years as head of publications and now the head of the organization.

00;04;00;29 - 00;04;20;09

Stephen Gutowski

But I don't know. I just want to get your reaction to this. I guess Hamlin is staying on as head of the NRA. I don't know. What is your immediate takeaway for this story and the kind of impact you could see it having on Hamlin's role at the NRA and the organization overall?

00;04;20;12 - 00;04;42;27

Cam Edwards

Well, I mean, listen, you know, when the NRA is, meeting to, sort of rehabilitate its image right after, you know, all of the corruption allegations and, the financial wrongdoing that we've seen on the top on the part of, you know, NRA executives in the past, something like this is, has the very least not helpful to the NRA, right?

00;04;42;27 - 00;05;08;11

Cam Edwards

I mean, as you noted, this was 44, 45 years ago. Doug Hamlin, to the best of our knowledge, has not had any other run ins with the law. At least nothing that has, come to light in the press. Nothing that has been uncovered. So, you know, I, you know, from a from a legal perspective, this frankly, it shouldn't impact Hamlin's tenure, but we're talking about the court of public opinion two.

00;05;08;13 - 00;05;34;16

Cam Edwards

Right. And it's going to be pretty easy for gun control advocates, for the anti-gun media to, you know, just label Hamlin as a cat killer, cat abuser, cat, mutilate her. Going forward, every time they mention the NRA and it's, executive Vice president CEO right. I expect that we will probably have that description added on to, to Doug Hamlin's name.

00;05;34;18 - 00;05;58;17

Cam Edwards

And so I don't know that this is something that you can get away from, right. If you are Doug Hamlin, an it. And if Doug Hamlin was not working in this, you know, very high profile position, I imagine most people wouldn't care. Right? I imagine that if Doug Hamlin were an insurance agent in, you know, Sandusky, Ohio, the Guardian would not have written the story.

00;05;58;17 - 00;06;21;11

Cam Edwards

He would not have run with this story. Sure. But he is the CEO and the EVP of the NRA. And so I think that this is going to be something that continues to be hung around his neck, and it's something that the organization has got to be saddled with going forward. Whether or not, you know, that impacts donations, whether or not that impacts memberships, I think remains to be seen.

00;06;21;14 - 00;06;27;29

Cam Edwards

But, you know, I think it's fair to say that the the anti-gun meeting, the gun control lobby can have a field day with this going forward.

00;06;28;01 - 00;06;54;07

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah. And and I think it's going to turn off a lot of regular people. Right. And this is something that is, represents, well, to most people the sort of animal cruelty. I understand that Hamlin is saying he was not directly involved in the actual killing of the cat. The contemporaneous reporting from the time, which there was quite a lot of this, was actually quite a big story when it happened.

00:06:54:09 - 00:07:16:20

Stephen Gutowski

You know, it doesn't directly say that Hamlin was one of the people, one of the the the men who actually, carried out the killing of the cat. It does he obviously did. Pleaded no contest and did a lot of the reporting. Seems to there's an anonymous account from one of the five men that says basically three of them actually did the killing, and the other two knew about it but didn't stop it.

00:07:16:23 - 00:07:41:04

Stephen Gutowski

That's sort of in line with what the judge said to Hamlin at sentencing. Maybe that was his role. It's not entirely crystal clear, right. And, you know, that makes sense somewhat, because this happened quite a long time ago. And, we have video or whatever of the incident we just have reporting to go off of. And what Doug Hamlin is saying now, I don't know how much it matters whether he was directly involved or not.

00:07:41:04 - 00:08:02:18

Stephen Gutowski

It's going to be something that's so gruesome to most people that it's going to make them think twice about being a part of the NRA at a time when a lot of people have already thought twice about doing that right, they're not even done. They haven't wrapped up their the settlement for the last scandal, their last executive vice president Wayne Lapiere.

00:08:02:18 - 00:08:15:01

Stephen Gutowski

Right. And diverting millions of dollars. Very different kind of scandal obviously. And one that was directly related to his work at the NRA, but still they're still going through that. And now they have to deal with this.

00:08:15:03 - 00:08:31:24

Cam Edwards

Yeah. I, you know, I, I honestly, I don't know how much of an impact this is going to have because this did happen 45 years ago. I mean, listen, you've got Donald Trump, a guy who was convicted of, you know, 30 some odd felonies, earlier this year, who is neck and neck with Kamala Harris could very well be elected president.

00:08:31:26 - 00:08:53:21

Cam Edwards

You know, that hasn't turned off, the vast majority of Trump supporters. So, you know, if you are ideologically inclined to be in an array supporter, if you're ideologically inclined to be a second image supporter, I don't know that something even as awful as, you know, what was described in these, reports from 4 or 5 years ago, is going to say, okay, you know what?

00:08:53:21 - 00:09:09:00

Cam Edwards

I'm never good that that's the deal breaker for me, right? I'm never going to donate to the NRA. I'm never going to belong to the NRA. As long as Doug Hamel is in charge. In fact, I think it's been kind of interesting. Steven, I don't know if you've noticed this, but I know we're going to get into the fact that the NRA was supposed to have a rally with Donald Trump this week.

00:09:09:00 - 00:09:42:03

Cam Edwards

And so our next week in Savannah, Georgia, that was canceled because of scheduling conflicts. I've actually been kind of surprised at how few even left leaning media outlets have tried to tie this in to, the Guardian report on, you know, this, animal abuse. Most of the coverage that I've seen is Trump's too tired. Trump's exhausted. Trump wants to run away from, you know, any, type of appearance that might not be a friendly interview, which doesn't really make sense when you're talking about an array rally.

00:09:42:05 - 00:09:43:07

Stephen Gutowski
Right.

00:09:43:10 - 00:09:59:04

Cam Edwards

But I've actually been kind of surprised that we haven't seen more attempts to try to, you know, go after the NRA. I think a lot of the left leaning media has been more focused on pursuing Trump right now and trying to knock Trump down a rung rather than, you know, trying to use this to go after the NRA.

00:09:59:06 - 00:10:26:05

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah, it well, and I think if I'm being perfectly honest as to why there hasn't been, an attempt or a larger narrative of connecting this story with Donald Trump. And look, I think that, canceling this event isn't a is because they don't want that connection to be extremely obvious, like they don't want him standing on stage next to him because that will elevate most likely this story.

00:10:26:07 - 00:10:54:28

Stephen Gutowski

But, you know, I think it says a lot about what where the NRA is today. Like the reason that you're not hearing that is because a lot of people, just especially in media, don't pay attention to anything happening at the NRA. Doug Hamlin is not a well-known person. He's not wind up here. He may be the head of the NRA, but the NRA is severely diminished, as both an overall organization and a political force at this point.

00:10:55:00 - 00:11:21:23

Stephen Gutowski

And so I if I'm being, you know, if I'm giving you my, my, like, analysis, my take on why we aren't seeing this talked about more in national media is I think it's because a lot of the national media has stopped paying attention to what the NRA is doing. Even with a pretty salacious story like this one, you have, oddly, it's been something that's gotten a lot more coverage in British papers like the Daily Mail and The Guardian have written a number of stories on it.

00:11:21:25 - 00:11:39:24

Stephen Gutowski

You haven't seen it much in American media. I think they just kind of have forgotten about the NRA. Like, that's not necessarily a good reason. Like, it's not good for the NRA, that that's why it's not getting coverage. But I guess it it is keeping this from getting as much traction as maybe otherwise. But I don't know.

00:11:39:26 - 00:11:42:14

Stephen Gutowski

Does that make sense to what do you think?

00:11:42:16 - 00:11:59:27

Cam Edwards

You know, there could be some of that, although I think the NRA is still certainly the gun lobby here. The gun control lobby's favorite punching bag. Right. So I think in that respect, you would expect the media to sort of glom onto this. I think it's just the timing of this. I think it's the fact that we're in the waning days of the presidential election.

00:12:00:05 - 00:12:21:07

Cam Edwards

And, you know, I think the media's focus is almost exclusively at this point on Trump and Harris. Yeah. Sure. And even though, you know, you could try to tie in, the, the, you know, coverage of what happened with Doug Hamlin and these, frat brothers 45 years ago to, you know, the NRA rally, this week.

00:12:21:09 - 00:12:21:27

Stephen Gutowski

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Cam Edwards

I think it's just an easier story for the anti-Trump media. And I'm talking about, you know, Partizan outlets like raw Story and Daily Beast and, you know, those types of entities to use this to go after Trump. Right? Because the minister, not the NRA, is going to be around after the election. How effective it might be. I think it's an open question.

00;12;44;01 - 00;12;55;13

Cam Edwards

But I think the priority for, you know, those on the left right now is to defeat Donald Trump. Not necessarily to destroy Doug Hamlin. Right.

00;12;55;13 - 00;13;19;06

Stephen Gutowski

Sure, sure. Yeah. No, absolutely. I think, you know, that's a fair point. It's it is probably partially just being overshadowed by it's not directly was connected to the election. I mean, the close thing is the the rally which they which they canceled. Now, they said it was scheduling conflicts. They didn't give any more details than that, and they wouldn't answer questions about whether it was connect to this story.

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Stephen Gutowski

I think it's hard to believe that this had no impact on that. And, and that's where, you know, perhaps it starts to play a more direct role in assessing what's, you know, the NRA's position because, you know, another story that I wrote this week and certainly a story that you've been following as well, is, the spending race between the gun control groups and the gun rights groups, where the NRA still is by far the dominant player on the gun rights side.

00;13;50;21 - 00;14;14;12

Stephen Gutowski

You know, despite everything that this happened in its diminished status, losing a million plus members, you know, not being able to raise anywhere near the money it did in, say, 2016. It's still the biggest player by a significant margin in the gun rights space. However, it is now clearly being outraised by the gun control groups. Really, for the first time.

00;14;14;15 - 00;14;46;04

Stephen Gutowski

You know, the year 2018, it was, I think the gun control groups had a slight advantage at the end of that election cycle. But otherwise the NRA has always even 2020, they did better than the gun control groups. And that's no longer the case. And you're starting to see the gun control groups really press the advantage by announcing \$15 million in new spending this last week alone, all in all kinds of different races, even beyond the presidential race and the NRA counter while they are still spending.

00;14;46;04 - 00;15;16;15

Stephen Gutowski

They did announce a seven figure, radio buy in Pennsylvania, which is significant. I feel like the what they've tried to lean back on now, they don't have \$50 million to put into the election like they once did. Is events for Trump like they did a Pennsylvania event, the Great American Outdoor Show. They had him speak at their annual meeting, and they were supposed to have him do this Georgia event.

00;15;16;18 - 00;15;36;04

Stephen Gutowski

Right before the election. Right. This was next week, like a week out from Election Day. And with that gone, likely in part because of this story, you know, where are they at now? Like, do you think that's significant that they aren't able to even do that anymore?

00;15;36;07 - 00;15;59;04

Cam Edwards

You know, I think it is significant, but I think what's even more significant is something that you mentioned, a little bit earlier, and that's the fact that despite the NRA has diminished status and they are spending less, they are much more selective in the races that they're targeting right there. Hitting, you know, Pennsylvania, I think they're, up on the air in Montana, I believe, with ads against Jon Tester promoting that.

00;15;59;04 - 00;16;18;18

Cam Edwards

Yes, she is. The fact that there haven't been any other groups that have stepped up. Right. So it's not just the rise in spending, and it's not just Everytown on the Gun Control side, as you mentioned, Giffords is you know, it's been I think they just announced \$15 million, in more spending. Brady is pretty active this campaign cycle.

00;16;18;20 - 00;16;40;06

Cam Edwards

And over on the pro to a side, we've seen, you know, groups like the National Shooting Sports Foundation, they've launched, I think it's Protect Liberty PAC. Chris Cox, former, an array highly executive director, has a group that, is, you know, spending some money, but we haven't seen. It's not just that the NRA is spending less, it's that other groups aren't spending more to make up the difference.

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Cam Edwards

Right. And that to me, I think is the most concerning thing, because either those dollars that were being directed towards the NRA, in years past are where where are they going? Are they just, you know, stuck in people's wallets and pocketbooks? Are they being devoted to, you know, individual campaigns as opposed to, you know, PAC spending?

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Cam Edwards

But I, you know, that that I think is more of a long term concern. I mean, after the election is over and the dust settles, when we talk about how gun owners and outspoken advocates are reaching out to the electorate in 2022 or excuse me, in 2026 and 2028, we need to figure out where those dollars have gone, right?

00;17;25;22 - 00;17;46;17

Cam Edwards

Because it's not just that it's not going to the NRA. Where are those dollars going if they're being spent at all? And how do Second Amendment supporters get those dollars back so that we can, at the very least, level the playing field once again, and maybe get back to the days where, you know, pro-choice voices are outspending, the gun control advocates.

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Stephen Gutowski

I think that's a very good point. And and I would also note, too, that the other problem, the NRA and other gun rights advocates are facing in this realm, the political spending realm is that, the gun control groups are upping their their push. You know, they talked about doing Everytown, talked about how they were going to spend \$50 million in 2020, and then they just didn't do it.

00;18;10;11 - 00;18;31;29

Stephen Gutowski

But this time around, they've pledged to spend 45 million, and it looks like they actually are doing it. We're seeing FEC receipts now. You know, there's the same old disparity here where a lot of the gun control groups are are funded in large part by, you know, a small number of very rich people, namely Michael Bloomberg.

00;18;32;01 - 00;18;56;23

Stephen Gutowski

Steve Ballmer, the former Microsoft CEO. And so but but it does seem like they're actually following through on these

commitments to spend huge in, in this election, much more so than they did in previous cycles. And you don't see that kind of, push from big dollar donors on the gun right side. Now, actually, let me hit you with this.

00;18;56;23 - 00;19;27;16

Stephen Gutowski

And, you know, and maybe a little bit of a curveball, but, I've been wondering about this. Elon Musk obviously has the potential to be somebody who can counter a guy like Michael Bloomberg in this space. He has launched, a series of PACs now for that benefit, mostly Donald Trump. But, his big thing right now is, trying to pay people to get registered voters to sign a petition.

00;19;27;19 - 00;19;55;12

Stephen Gutowski

And the petition has a line about gun rights. And. Right. It's not a it's really a very short thing, and it's just a sort of statement of belief thing. And I think it's just kind of a voter data generating operation. But, you know, he's made a number of pro Second Amendment statements in recent times. You know, do you think he could be a viable alternative for the, the pro-gun side to try and be, pro-gun?

00;19;55;12 - 00;19;58;03

Cam Edwards

Bloomberg's or is this.

00;19;58;06 - 00;19;59;23

Stephen Gutowski

Something that's if that's what.

00;19;59;25 - 00;20;03;00

Cam Edwards

He decides he wants to do? You know.

00;20;03;00 - 00;20;06;22

Stephen Gutowski

I, you know, donate to the NRA or anybody like that. Yeah, it's just something.

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Cam Edwards

And that's the thing. I mean, I'm not averse to having a pro women billionaire, decide that they're going to, you know, spend hundreds of millions of dollars, protecting our segment rights, to, to counter Bloomberg. Right. But, you know, it's kind of interesting. I mean, Bloomberg, hey, you know, back even 20 years ago with Mayors Against Illegal Guns, Bloomberg was very much the face of the organizations that he founded.

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Cam Edwards

Right. Even in the early days of Everytown for Gun Safety, Bloomberg was much more out in front. And I think, you know, maybe going back to when Bloomberg decided to run for president and just absolutely imploded, after spending, what, \$1 billion, you know, and got I think he got one primary vote.

00;20;49;23 - 00;20;52;05

Stephen Gutowski

Then he got a couple.

00;20;52;08 - 00;21;19;05

Cam Edwards

You know, he's really taken a step back in terms of being the face of these organizations. He's still very much funding those organizations. But you don't hear much about Michael Bloomberg himself these days. And instead he has done I

mean, I hate to say it, but he's done a very good job of putting together this infrastructure, right. Where, you know, after Bloomberg passes away, every town is going to live on every town law is going to live on, Moms Against Action's gonna live on.

00;21;19;08 - 00;21;42;18

Stephen Gutowski

And every town has really been a big thorn in the side of the NRA. They've they've put resources into looking into all of the dirty laundry, the NRA and and getting that to people like Tisha James, to initiate the sort of, investigations that have really troubled them. Right. Like, this is it's been effective and not just in the sense that they're spending a bunch of money on ads.

00;21;42;20 - 00;22;02;10

Cam Edwards

Right? You know, he is he has created an infrastructure, that really I think is much more effective. And I hate to say it, but I think it's the case it's much more effective than what we saw, you know, in the 70s and 80s with hand gun control incorporated with, Brady or the Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence.

00;22;02;13 - 00;22;23;13

Cam Edwards

He's created these institutions. Right. And so, you know, if we're looking at NRA 2.0 or we're looking at what comes after the NRA, if the NRA is not able to right to ship, I think it it's going to take more than just, you know, Elon Musk cutting checks or wanting to become the face of the Second Amendment.

00;22;23;13 - 00;22;44;25

Cam Edwards

Right. We really do need those those institutions that are effective. And I think that's one of the things about the NRA when it was, you know, firing on all cylinders. Yes, Wayne Lapierre was the face of the NRA. But, you know, the NRA as an institution had a very effective team of lobbyists, had a very effective team of litigators.

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Cam Edwards

And unfortunately, you know, a lot of that has either disappeared completely or it has been curtailed dramatically, because they're having to allocate so many dollars towards legal fees. And they've seen that decline in membership. So they don't have enough money, you know, they don't have as much money coming in as they, as they once did.

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Cam Edwards

And, you know, yeah, I think Elon Musk could play a role. I think that there are probably some other, you know, wealthy individuals who are segment supporters who could play that role, too. I think now the question is, do they want to spend the money on the NRA? Right. Or do they see that institution is so damaged that, okay, we're we're not going to, you know, put good money in after bad.

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Cam Edwards

And if they do decide that the NRA is not where they want to make those investments, is it existing organizations like the Second Movement Foundation or Gun Owners of America or Firearms Policy Coalition, or is there room for, you know, something to, that might become, as effective as the NRA? You know, a few weeks ago when I was talking with Chris Cox for, for Cannon Company, he said that this organization that he started, he has he has he is open to the idea of a continuing after the election.

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Cam Edwards

He is open to the idea of it becoming a membership based organization. And it may take something like that, you know, but, but, yeah, I mean, I think right now there is that disparity, certainly in terms of the, the big dollar donors, when it

comes to second movement supporters and then those trying to diminish our right.

00;24;20;03 - 00;24;46;19

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah. And, you know, I think the other for me, the primary question with somebody like Elon Musk is, is how actually committed to the idea of like changing policy on guns because, you know, it seems like he's mainly using it as just a way to gather signatures on a voter data mining operation at this point. And, you know, you you can look at, you know, the things he said in the past, supporting, like gun licensing and gun insurance and stuff like that.

00;24;46;19 - 00;25;10;13

Stephen Gutowski

And maybe he's changed his mind now. But I, I'm more skeptical of that. Like, there's, like, I don't see him putting money into anything that you're talking about. Right? He's putting money into a voter get out organization, try and benefit Donald Trump for the election. And that's, you know, that's perfectly fine. And you could, and I just don't know that it extends beyond that is my, I guess, my biggest question.

00;25;10;13 - 00;25;21;19

Stephen Gutowski

But when you're dealing with a guy that has that much money and, you know, I haven't covered it much because I don't know that I see anything of real substance to it yet. But he's got there's a lot of potential there. Obviously.

00;25;21;21 - 00;25;35;23

Cam Edwards

Yeah, absolutely. And and I you know, I think a lot of it is going to depend on what happens after the election. You know, I mean, of all of the spending that the gun control groups have committed in this election, I'm curious. I don't know if you've taken a look at any of the ads that they're actually running.

00;25;35;23 - 00;25;56;13

Cam Edwards

But, you know, in 2019, in Virginia, every town spent big, Brody Terry McCollum's campaign for governor. They weren't talking a lot about gun control. Right. And that continued in 2022. They spent a lot of money, but they talked a lot about abortion, and mostly still their ads mentioned gun control at the end. Some of them didn't.

00;25;56;15 - 00;26;14;24

Cam Edwards

Right. So, you know, what type of messaging are the gun control groups actually doing right now? Because you can make the case that they, too, are sort of putting their own agenda on the back burner. We're not gonna talk as much about guns, but we are going to talk about these Democratic candidates, because if they get elected, then we think we're gonna be able to get our way, right?

00;26;14;24 - 00;26;15;11

Cam Edwards

Right.

00;26;15;14 - 00;26;38;21

Stephen Gutowski

Right. Yeah, that's definitely been a part of their strategy for years now. And it has continued, if you look at their ads, including these most recent ads that, they announced over the past week. So, you know, it certainly is something that they, they recognize that perhaps there are other issues that we'll have a greater effect per dollar spent, I guess.

00;26;38;23 - 00;27;02;07

Stephen Gutowski

Now they do try to usually they try to connect it to guns, in some way. But yeah, they're putting abortion oftentimes there is. Now the NRA does this a little bit sometimes with crime I mean kind of obviously crime is a bit more

connected to gun policy than abortion is. But you know, a lot of their ads this cycle have also led with crime.

00;27;02;09 - 00;27;22;05

Stephen Gutowski

Before they get to gun policy. So, you know, it's not an, it's not an unheard of strategy. I guess it's but it is interesting and it does underlie, you know, what they're thinking, whether there is our issue, the best issue, just to make the primary point in these ads that we're spending this money on or not.

00;27;22;07 - 00;28;02;22

Stephen Gutowski

But getting back, I guess, to the NRA, to the NRA stuff and this, this Hamlin incident and what you see, coming down the line for the group, I mean, it feels like they just go from one scandal to the next now. And, I don't know, do you think? I mean, we, are they going to be able to get back to a point of stability and actually try to implement some of these strategies that you're talking about here for, for, you know, improving their, their messaging, their ground game, their all this stuff to compete better with, with the gun control groups that are pulling ahead, in some ways now, like,

00;28;02;25 - 00;28;07;03

Stephen Gutowski

or is this just going to be scandal after scandal and it's just chaos all the time.

00;28;07;05 - 00;28;34;27

Cam Edwards

Yeah. Well, I mean, listen, if there are, if there's a potential to create a scandal, the media, I think, is going to try to create that scandal. And, you know, in this case, there was a legitimate issue from 45 years ago, right. The The Guardian raised. I'll tell you, I think one of the biggest challenges that the NRA faces is not necessarily those external opponents that are, you know, eager to bring down the organization.

00;28;34;27 - 00;28;54;03

Cam Edwards

But I think it's the infighting that we still continue to see. Right. And, you know, whether it is the, the efforts on the board to get rid of the Special Litigation Council that, passed with a majority vote of the board, but, it was not enacted because not enough of a majority, voted to dissolve that committee.

00;28;54;06 - 00;29;16;15

Cam Edwards

Whether it is the, you know, anonymous group of 14 and or employees who, recently submitted a letter, you know, basically bemoaning, Doug Hamlin being named EVP and CEO and saying that is up to the job. There is there is still a lot of infighting within the NRA, right? The the board members, the staff.

00;29;16;18 - 00;29;37;03

Cam Edwards

You've got, I think, groups that are not all rowing in the same direction. And I think that is a huge challenge to. Right, because certainly those external foes for the NRA are out there, but you still have this battle over the leadership of the NRA. This battle over the direction of the future of the NRA coming from within the organization.

00;29;37;05 - 00;29;55;11

Cam Edwards

And that, I think is likely to continue. I mean, we'll see what happens with the next round of board elections. I've been pretty encouraged by the number of reformers who have, either been nominated by the nominating committee or they have gotten on to the ballot via petition. I think there's going to be a really strong field.

00;29;55;11 - 00;30;15;00

Cam Edwards

You know, last time around, there were I think it was what the for, for reform, right. Was the, the catch phrase. I think

they're going to be far more than for reformers, that are running, for the NRA board next year. And so it might take that election and maybe another election after that. Before this infighting stops.

00:30:15:00 - 00:30:35:21

Cam Edwards

The question is, you know, what does it look like in 12 months or 24 months or 36 months? If you continue to see this division and you continue to see the amount of, dollars that are going to, you know, fund their legal fees as opposed to, you know, education outreach and then, you know, political activity.

00:30:35:23 - 00:30:57:18

Cam Edwards

So, you know, I think it's very much an open question as to what the future of the NRA is at this moment. And there are a lot of forces, both external and internal, that I think are working against, the NRA being as strong, as it was just, you know, 5 or 6 years ago.

00:30:57:20 - 00:31:19:11

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah. And that brings me to another thought on this. You know, because we're talking a lot about the external view of the NRA after this, this animal cruelty story and how it could affect that. But, you know, there, as you mentioned, this is, there is a big internal struggle still happening. Doug Hamlin is a big part of that.

00:31:19:11 - 00:31:54:08

Stephen Gutowski

He was, elected as part of the reformer group. And is the most powerful of the reformers at the NRA because he's the executive vice president, CEO position. He can he can do quite a lot. From there, you know, presumably this is going to hurt him and the reformers in that internal fight, right? I mean, it seems just as likely to be, a negative drawback in the internal fight as it does in the NRA's external reputation.

00:31:54:11 - 00:32:08:15

Cam Edwards

Yeah. I mean, I think that, that letter from the 14, anonymous NRA staffers came out after the Guardians story, I think mentioned, referenced, you know, the legal issues that the Amon had in 1979.

00:32:08:17 - 00:32:21:18

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah. They said they feel unsafe working there with them. Pretty harsh, terms and that in that letter. And I think they're going through the whistleblower system that was set up as part of the part of the settlement that's coming.

00:32:21:20 - 00:32:55:12

Cam Edwards

So, yeah, I mean, I think that that definitely has the potential to weaken Hamlin's position. Then the question becomes, you know, that's is he lose enough support, where the board would vote to remove him or even a vote, you know, called for that. He might survive, right? That still indicates that, he would be in a very sort of tenuous position, because, you know, you talk about and historically, you're right, the CEO and EVP role has been, if certainly the most powerful position of the NRA, if not an all powerful position in the NRA.

00:32:55:12 - 00:32:55:22

Cam Edwards

Right.

00:32:55:22 - 00:32:57:12

Stephen Gutowski

But how about the energy that. Right.

00:32:57;14 - 00:33:15;17

Cam Edwards

Right. But one of the outcomes, all of the, litigation involving the New York attorney General is that the board was supposed to be strengthened, right? The board was supposed to be more than just a rubber stamp, the CEO and the EVP. And so there are some changing dynamics, I think, in terms of how the NRA is run.

00:33:15;19 - 00:33:35;10

Cam Edwards

And again, not everybody on that board is on the same page as to what that means and as to what direction they want to go. So I that's why I say, I think the next round of elections really could be critical, because right now I think the reformers on paper anyway, they're they appear to be in the majority.

00:33:35;12 - 00:33:36;11

Stephen Gutowski

Yep.

00:33:36;13 - 00:33:39;26

Cam Edwards

But that doesn't necessarily mean that they are operating from a position of strength.

00:33:39;29 - 00:33:56;09

Stephen Gutowski

Right now, especially because of the way that the, Lapierre allies I don't know what we want to call them. I know that reformers call them the old guard. I don't know what they would call themselves, to be honest with you, but, I think it's fair to call people like Charles Cotton when allies. They're very close with Wayne.

00:33:56;09 - 00:34:25;01

Stephen Gutowski

They were supportive of him for a long time. They seemed to know the institutional rules a bit better than the reformers. That was my impression. Having been at the last board meeting where the Wayne allies outmaneuvered the reformers. Which you, like you said, had a majority for doing things like removing the special litigation committee that oversees the Brewer firm that oversees the New York litigation, that kind of stuff.

00:34:25;03 - 00:34:43;01

Stephen Gutowski

And so, you know, I everything I've heard from my, my sources, at least inside the inner right, nobody knew about this Hamlin story ahead of time. And it makes me wonder, shouldn't have disclosed this like, it's one thing for people to hear about this story, say, you know, there's a lot of things you could say.

00:34:43;01 - 00:35:02;18

Stephen Gutowski

There's. It was a long time ago. He has a he's lived, upstanding life since then. He wasn't directly involved in the gruesome part. Maybe. You know, there's things you could say and still perhaps come around to supporting it, but shouldn't have. Didn't people have, like, especially reformers who were putting a lot on the line by backing him?

00:35:02;21 - 00:35:13;04

Stephen Gutowski

Then they have the right to know that he did this stuff. Should and shouldn't he be out there explaining his view of it? He really just has this one statement that's a couple sentences long.

00:35:13;06 - 00:35:33;27

Cam Edwards

Yeah. I mean, I think now we're probably getting into, you know, crisis management, PR and are you better off, you know, talking about this or you better off not saying anything about it? The issue disclosure during the vetting process, I

think is an interesting one. And again, I haven't talked with any of the board members or Doug Hamlin about this, so I don't know.

00:35:33;27 - 00:35:37;26

Stephen Gutowski

What's their process, I guess is the other question it raises.

00:35:37;29 - 00:36:02;06

Cam Edwards

Right? I mean, well, that's the thing, right? Because his name was somewhat of a surprise when he was nominated by the reformers, as EVP and CEO. So I don't know what kind of process there was. You know, at the same time, I mean, again, you know, 4 or 5 years ago or so long time 1979 was a long time ago.

00:36:02;11 - 00:36:21;25

Cam Edwards

Right. And as you say, we wouldn't expect that something that a college kid, no matter how heinous it was. There's something that happened, you know, to somebody when they were 21 or 22 or something that somebody did when they were 21 or 22, would necessarily be a joke around their neck for the rest of their lives.

00:36:21;27 - 00:36:23;16

Cam Edwards

You know, it's a misdemeanor offense.

00:36:23;18 - 00:36:41;24

Stephen Gutowski

The head is different from just a normal job, right? It comes with so much more scrutiny, and you become the face of the organization. I mean, that's, it's at least something. I feel like the reformers who backed him should have been notified about, so they could make a decision as to whether it's whether they you know, how they felt about it.

00:36:41;24 - 00:36:45;00

Stephen Gutowski

I don't know, I don't know.

00:36:45;02 - 00:37:03;16

Cam Edwards

I think it's fair to say, and again, I don't know, because I haven't talked with any of those, board members or Helen herself, if they were, aware of this. And if they were, if they decide, okay, not that big a deal or, had they been made aware of this, would they have, you know, gone with somebody else where they have nominated somebody other than Doug Hamlin?

00:37:03;19 - 00:37:24;19

Cam Edwards

As the EVP and CEO? I don't know, but, I do think that this is something that, as I said at the beginning, this is something that the gun control groups are going to bring up, after the election, when the media's focus is less on Donald Trump. And, you know, in the gun control fights, their attention, focuses more on the NRA.

00:37:24;21 - 00:37:48;19

Cam Edwards

Does this become something that, again, becomes part of the standard reporting on on Hamlin? Some of that is just, you know, mentioned or acknowledged in every story. And if so, then yes, that I think that does hurt his ability to effectively, serve as the CEO and EVP is as the sort of de facto face of the NRA.

00:37:48;19 - 00:38:15;15

Cam Edwards

Right? You want to have somebody you want to have somebody who's squeaky clean. You want to have somebody who, you know, doesn't have something that is embarrassing or controversial or disturbing. In their past. Right? Even if there was no direct involvement, even if he was not the one who, you know, apologies for getting graphic. Even if he wasn't the one who cut off the paws of the kitty or strung up the cat instead of on fire, you know.

00:38;15;16 - 00:38;18;03

Stephen Gutowski

I mean, just thinking about that description of it just.

00:38;18;03 - 00:38;36;26

Cam Edwards

Being associated with that, you know, I that I think is, is going to be damaging. Again, you know, going forward, particularly if the media decides to focus on that and sort of hammer home that, you know, hey, this was who Doug Hamlin was back in the 1970s. Yeah.

00:38;36;26 - 00:38;49;18

Stephen Gutowski

So, I mean, I think it's going to be around even if he doesn't, even if he's even if he does resign today. Right. Like, even if they replaced him tomorrow, this is a story that's probably going to stick with the NRA for a long time now.

00:38;49;20 - 00:39;10;10

Cam Edwards

I, I'm less I, I'm, I'm less convinced of that. Okay. Interesting. We live in a day and age where there are a lot of stories in the news cycle, like Tim Walz lied about his, combat record, lied about being at, Tiananmen Square. You know, and that's basically become a non-issue, even though that was just revealed two weeks ago.

00:39;10;10 - 00:39;14;03

Cam Edwards

And here's somebody who's running for the vice presidential, you know, vice president, United States.

00:39;14;03 - 00:39;16;14

Stephen Gutowski

So the news cycle doesn't get very fast. That's true.

00:39;16;15 - 00:39;28;04

Cam Edwards

It does. And I think if Hamlin were to not be a part of the NRA, that wouldn't that would be a non-story. I, I doubt that it would linger on, after his departure.

00:39;28;07 - 00:39;50;06

Stephen Gutowski

Interesting. Interesting point. That could be I don't know, either way. I appreciate you coming on and talking about, the implications of this. I know it's not an easy thing to talk about, and and that you you, are a big NRA support. You've you work for them for a long time, work with them and and want to see the organization.

00:39;50;08 - 00:40;10;01

Stephen Gutowski

Do the best it can. So it's not easy to come on and, and talk about these, negative stories about it. And, and unfortunately, they keep happening. Maybe they'll be, maybe we'll get a more positive story soon. Here, let's bring you on and and discuss, that's at a level we just, we talked about.

00:40;10;02 - 00:40;12;09

Stephen Gutowski

What's it what? You know, what the news is?

00:40;12;09 - 00:40;32;09

Cam Edwards

That's you go where the news takes you, man. And, yeah, unfortunately, this is, one of those stories and, you know, again, I think that, one of the differences, one of the things that I'd like to be different about Second Amendment supporters than gun control activists is I want us to be able to acknowledge those difficult stories.

00:40;32;09 - 00:40;49;12

Cam Edwards

I don't want to be able to, you know, to to just try to run from them, when, you know, the Minnesota state senator who was the deciding vote for gun control was arrested and charged with burglarizing her, stepmother's house last year. You know, the gun control groups didn't talk about that, right? They just sort of played ostrich.

00:40;49;12 - 00:41;08;13

Cam Edwards

They bury their heads in the sand. We're not going to even mention this. Bring it up. We're certainly not going to call for resignation. We're not going to say we, condemn her acts, just pretend like it didn't happen. So. And maybe, maybe that was the wise course of action from a public relations perspective. But, I think we need to be honest with ourselves.

00:41;08;13 - 00:41;19;17

Cam Edwards

I think we need to be honest with each other. And, you know, that means that you do have to talk about some of these things that, are not great stories for the NRA and are not great stories for Second Amendment supporters.

00:41;19;20 - 00:41;39;01

Stephen Gutowski

Yeah. No. Yeah, I, I certainly think it's, from my perspective, what I try to do with reload, right, is, be as honest as possible and try to give people, the, analysis that that I think is true. And, this is a story that's very negative and I think has a very big impact on the NRA.

00:41;39;01 - 00:41;55;05

Stephen Gutowski

But, but also like, you know, and I try to bring on people that I think are honest and smart and maybe disagree with me to some extent. We've had some of, you know, we're a little bit different wavelengths on where how much this matters and how much, how much, how many legs it has, I guess, moving forward.

00:41;55;05 - 00:42;18;02

Stephen Gutowski

But, but that's good because it's, it's, important for, for the audience to have a good understanding of, from different perspectives, people who, who are being honest. That's what I, that's what I try to do with guests, is not so much whether you're the most famous person or the most, you know, the most influential person or whatever.

00:42;18;04 - 00:42;32;24

Stephen Gutowski

I'm trying to get people who are the most honest. I don't necessarily always want people who are who are agreeing with me on it. I mean, obviously we agree pretty, often in our analysis, I think. But but you get the idea here. I'm trying to get, honest.

00:42;32;26 - 00:42;36;03

Cam Edwards

Devastatingly handsome guests that I'm glad you have that rule.

00:42;36;10 - 00:42;51;28

Stephen Gutowski

People are the best. Beards. That's what I listen, mainly, but. All right, well, I know you got, more work to do. Speaking of which, where can, people find your work? And your show as well?

00:42:52:00 - 00:43:09:18

Cam Edwards

Yeah. You better just check out Bearingarms.com. We're updating the website daily with the latest segment of news and information. And then Monday through Thursday, we do bearing arms Cam and Company. You can find that on, on the website. Just go to Bear arms.com. It's right there in the upper right hand portion of the screen. But also, Spotify, SoundCloud, all the major podcast platforms.

00:43:09:18 - 00:43:10:28

Cam Edwards

You can find us there as well.

00:43:11:00 - 00:43:14:26

Stephen Gutowski

Yep. And I was just on Cam and Company not that long ago. So people should check out.

00:43:15:00 - 00:43:17:27

Cam Edwards

Yes, you are, and you will be on again in the very near future, I am sure.

00:43:18:04 - 00:43:38:29

Stephen Gutowski

Yes. Same for you. One of my favorite guests to have on our show. And your show is one of my favorite to do. So. Now, it's not that we've gotten our love fest out of the way. I'm gonna, end the show here and tell people, a little bit about our sponsor