**Editor's Note:** *America’s Newspapers’ advocacy efforts include protecting the ability of newspapers to keep Americans informed with truthful, objective reporting. Members are encouraged to publish the opinion piece and editorial cartoon below or write their own to educate the public about this important issue.*

**Assaults on journalists are assaults on the rights of all Americans**

**Dean Ridings
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In the past, journalists in the USA have been able to safely perform their work, as domestic acts of violence against them were a rare occurrence. However, during the recent protests we’ve seen journalists attacked on Main Streets across America.

While some of these assaults can be accounted as inevitable injuries during the fog of civil unrest, many more appeared to be plainly purposeful attacks by police on reporters and photographers openly and lawfully doing their jobs.

Vice News reporter Michael Anthony Adams told The Washington Post that he repeatedly told Minneapolis police that he was a member of the media when they ordered a crowd to disperse. “I don’t care,” one officer said as he blasted him with pepper spray.

Los Angeles Times reporter Molly Hennessy-Fiske witnessed several journalists, all shouting they were press, who were nonetheless chased and cornered by Minneapolis police firing rubber bullets and spraying tear gas. Her colleague, photographer Carolyn Cole, was struck in the face by a rubber bullet. “I have never been fired at by police,” Hennessy-Fiske, who has reported from war zones in Iraq and Afghanistan, wrote on Saturday, May 30, “until tonight.” A rubber bullet fired by Minneapolis police left freelance photojournalist Linda Tirado permanently blinded in her left eye.

In Michigan, Detroit Free Pressreporter J.C. Reindel was sprayed with pepper gas by a police officer as he held up his news media identification. In Kentucky, a Louisville television news crew, broadcasting live, reported they were being targeted by police firing rubber bullets. In Texas, a Fort Wayne TV editor lost an eye to a tear gas canister fired into a crowd of protestors.

These deliberate assaults on journalists going about their jobs are an assault on the rights of all Americans. The press in these situations functions as the eyes and ears of the public, providing vital information and documenting events as they unfold. When the press is — as in the most horrific incidents during these protests — literally blinded, so is the public.

Officers are sworn to uphold the law, which includes the First Amendment right of the press to function without official impediments, let alone violence or arrest.

During this civil unrest, journalists are doing their jobs as information first responders who keep Americans informed with truthful, objective reporting. It’s now up to the other first responders, local law enforcement, to respect the work of journalists and the right of American citizens to know what the police and government officials are doing in their names.

Barely halfway through the year, 2020 has been a trying one for America’s free press. It has come under attack from unprecedented fiscal challenges, workforce disruptions and the reckless musings about the media from government leadership at multiple levels. What must always be protected in any year is the American people’s First Amendment right to access information unimpeded by government dictates or intimidation and by assuring the ongoing safety of journalists.

*On behalf of its approximately 1,500 newspaper and associate member companies, America’s Newspapers is committed to explaining, defending and advancing the vital role of newspapers in democracy and civil life. We put an emphasis on educating the public on all the ways newspapers contribute to building a community identity and the success of local businesses. Learn more:* [*www.newspapers.org*](http://www.newspapers.org)

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