

## AN ECHO PRESS EDITORIAL

# Attacks on journalists paint a chilling picture

Journalists around the globe don't receive a lot of support from the public. Sometimes it's warranted — when there is sloppy reporting, sensationalism or deliberate distortions of the truth, they should be held accountable.

Journalists also expect to take some heat for what they write. Not every story they do will please everyone.

But arresting journalists for simply doing their jobs? Or assaulting them? Or killing them?

Unfortunately, it happens way too often. Michael Castengera, a contributor with the Radio Television Digital News Association wrote this chilling column of the risks journalists face:

"The last year may well go down as one of the worst years ever recorded for journalists around the world," Castengera said. "And while 2021 was not as bad for journalists in America, there should be some concern for what the future holds, based on recent history. Here are some of the key facts:

▶ The number of journalists jailed for their work hit a global record in 2021.

▶ More female journalists were arrested globally in 2021 than ever recorded.

▶ Journalists 'detained for their work' globally in 2021 is the highest on record.

▶ A journalist was killed nearly every week around the world last year.

"Those are just some of the facts that came out in the annual reports by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF), looking at the worldwide picture," Castengera wrote. "In America, 2021 was not good, but it was not as bad as the rest of the world and, more critically, not nearly as bad as the previous 2020 — election — year, according to the U.S. Freedom Tracker site.

"More than 400 journalists were assaulted, and more than 140 journalists were arrested in 2020. On the surface at least, last year's 2021 numbers would appear to be an improvement. There were 'only' 142 assaults on journalists and 'only' 59 arrests of journalists," Castengera noted.

"Many believe that President Trump's attacks on the news media as the 'enemy of the people' spurred the attacks on the journalists. And while the

numbers dropped from 2020 to 2021, they're still frightening. There were as many assaults in 2021 as all three previous years (2017, 2018, 2019) combined, and as many arrests as all three of those years combined.

"That raises the frightening implication for some that such attacks may become the 'new norm' for reporters in the United States," Castengera concluded.

It's horrific to see so much hate and anger being directed at journalists and media outlets. During the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection at the nation's Capitol, it reached a fever pitch. Someone scratched "murder the media" into a door. Reporters who were trying to report from the streets were threatened and surrounded. Other media members inside the Capitol were forced to shelter in secure locations for hours.

Video from that day shows a crowd outside the Capitol building advancing on a camera crew, yelling, "Get out of here," and smashing equipment. Someone from the angry mob fashioned a noose out of a camera cord and hung it from a tree. More rioters chanted, "CNN sucks" as they stomped on cameras belonging to the Associated Press.

There were at least nine physical assaults against journalists covering the insurrection, according to U.S. Press Freedom Tracker. At least five journalists were arrested. At least four had their equipment damaged. Those numbers do not include incidents of harassment and intimidation.

Media-bashing has long been a favorite activity for some but the violence is escalating and the fallout is chilling. The United Nations addressed the topic during International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. "Threats of violence and attacks against journalists in particular create a climate of fear for media professionals, impeding the free circulation of information, opinions and ideas for all citizens," the U.N. said.

Journalism is under attack. It's time for reporters — and everyone who believes in the First Amendment — to push back against the violence and hate, and to remind others of the vital role the media plays in our democracy.

## IT'S OUR TURN

# The miracle of birth

I received an early valentine this year. I fell in love all over again on Feb. 12 at 5:25 p.m.

I was speechless with her beauty and perfection. My stomach flipped twice over, and tears welled my eyes, a feeling I hadn't experienced since I saw

my wife walk toward me down the aisle.

This new love of mine weighed 9 pounds and 6 oz with a length of 21.25 inches. Her name is Sonny Zimmerman, and she is my daughter.

The anticipation leading up to the big event had me on the edge of my seat. The midwife told us to come in on Feb. 11 to begin an induction as they did not want her going a week past her due date. She was supposed to be here on the 7th, but she is stubborn like her dad.

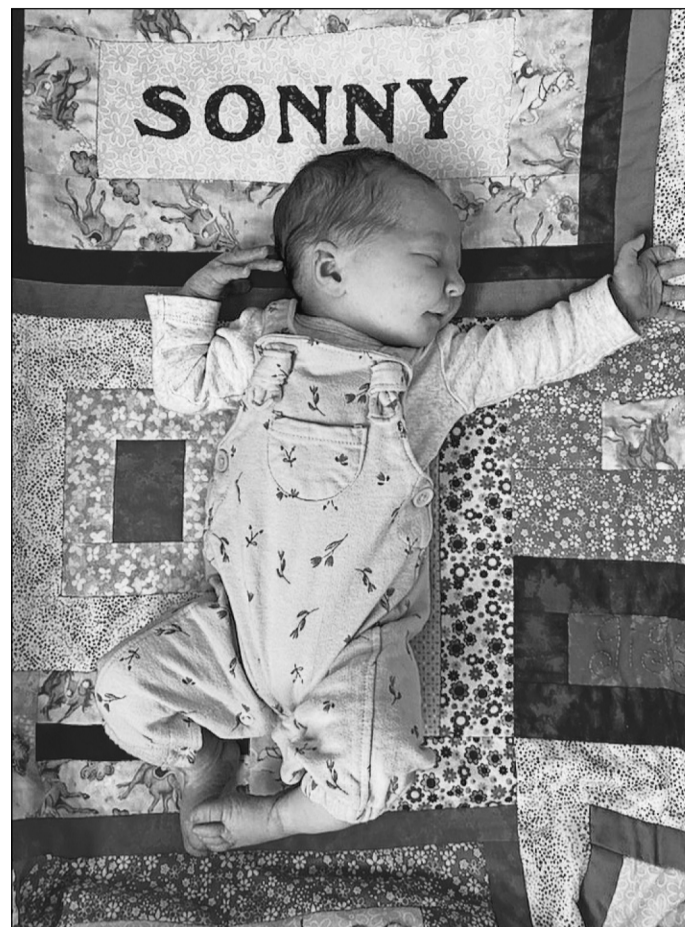
We arrived at the hospital early in the morning and the process began shortly after we were settling in.

The idea that I would soon be a dad still seemed unbelievable at this time, even in the middle of the night while my wife paced the room, feeling all sensations of a labored body. I did my best to comfort her and put her at ease, but she thought it was best to give her space. Her tone told me she meant it, and I obeyed.

Watching my wife go through the labor process gave me a different perspective. I always knew she was strong, but jeez, in those moments, she was a gladiator in battle, and I will never again complain when I have a cold.

It was a long process and probably seemed even longer for my wife, but near the evening of Saturday, Feb. 12, Sonny graced us with her presence.

There is a saying that a woman becomes a mom when she finds out she's pregnant, and a man becomes a father when he sees his baby, and as I said before, the idea that I was so close to holding my daughter didn't even seem



Thalen Zimmerman / Alexandria Echo Press  
Sonny Zimmerman, daughter of Jade and Thalen Zimmerman.

real. But I was expecting that to change when I saw her; I just didn't anticipate how overwhelming the feelings would be.

When I saw Sonny make the final breach of the womb, a light clicked on. I had to catch my breath as instant joy overcame me. I was speechless, and all I could do was cry and admire her. She is so perfect.

They put her on my wife's chest, and I couldn't help but go back and forth from looking at Sonny with awe and smothering my wife with kisses. I gave her my finger, and she gripped it tightly with her tiny fist. She is strong like her mother as well as beautiful.

Sonny has long dark hair with a little bit of curl. Her fingers are long — perfect for me to teach her guitar. She is curious as she follows voices attentively with her eyes. She is smart as she has become a pro at feeding right out of the womb. She is beautiful as she takes my breath away every time I look at her. All of the daily stresses that used to occupy my mind have become small and mundane. Family is my concentration. Everything I do in this life

will be done to care for and provide for her and my wife. My needs are at the bottom of the pedestal.

Two days later, we were able to leave the hospital and introduce Sonny to her home and her gentle giant of an older "brother" — Dude, a 90-pound German Shepherd. Dude was surprised by her arrival but already very protective of his little sister. He is always watching her and rushes to her side when she begins to cry.

My wife and I are extremely tired as she is on feeding duty, and I am on diaper duty, which literally is every hour through the night, but there is no way in heck we would change a thing. For as exhausted as we are, the overwhelming joy has yet to subside, and I highly doubt it ever will.

I will never stop thanking God for his miracle.

Sonny Zimmerman is named after her late grandpa, David "Sonny" Hjelm. I am writing this column on Feb. 16, which would have been his birthday.

"It's Our Turn" is a weekly column that rotates among members of the Echo Press editorial staff.

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## LETTERS

### More street lights are needed in Osakis

To the editor:

In the past several years there have been a number of changes and upgrades in the city of Osakis toward making the town more attractive and inviting. Examples: The cute little statues downtown and the use of public spaces to provide recreational areas (such as the block west of the visitor's center that is currently an ice rink) for our residents.

This is all well and good and for the most part I don't have an issue with making the downtown more beautiful; it's a fine use of taxpayer dollars, to a point.

However, I just have to ask our city leaders — when deciding how to spend the taxpayers' money, have they ever thought about adding a practical, common-sense item that

would enhance public safety and perhaps increase people's feeling of security in their neighborhoods?

I'm talking about street lights. In my opinion, this city is not adequately lighted. In the 11+ years I've lived here, I haven't noticed any new street lamps added in the residential areas. Definitely not on my side of town. I and a number of my neighbors like to walk our dogs after dark. Unfortunately, as it is winter the streets are slick, the nights are very dark, and one does not feel very safe and secure walking around with no street lights to show us the way.

I know I can't be the only person in town with limited vision and a risk of falling. On behalf of the others I'd like to request the city use some of our tax money for things that are practical and neces-

sary (for our safety and peace of mind) rather than things that simply look pretty. Please consider adding more street lights in areas other than downtown.

Carlene M. Dean  
Osakis, MN

### Climate change should not be a political issue

To the editor:

What on earth would it take for each of us to accept the reality of climate change?

We have been sent hurricanes, devastating fires, floods, famines, drought, tornadoes, melting ice caps, rising sea levels, wildlife facing extinction, etc, etc, ect! The list goes on. Do we really believe this is all going to go away?

This is not a political issue. Climate change doesn't care if one is a Republican, Democrat, Independent or what-

ever; it affects everyone and everything in this world. All life is threatened.

It's not too late. If we all embrace this knowledge and take responsibility now for this crisis and do what we must to save our beautiful Earth for our children, grandchildren and future generations.

Nina Rutledge  
Litchfield, MN

### If America is so bad, why are people clamoring to come here?

To the editor:

What if 2 million immigrants from a hundred countries came to America illegally, without being vetted or checked for COVID-19? Half of them get secretly flown to cities unknown in the dead of night. There, they receive health care, food, housing, and schooling for

the children. Only about half keep their court date to determine whether or not they get to stay in the USA. All expenses for this are paid for by you, the taxpayer.

What if President Biden on his first day in office canceled the XL pipeline? We moved from energy independent to energy dependent. Gas prices climb leading to historic inflation of goods and services.

What if we defund the police and release hardened criminals from jail? Murders, shootings, carjackings and shoplifting soar to new heights. People are afraid to walk the streets or take the subway. Gangs control the streets. Store owners relocate or close their doors for good.

What if the NFL promoted woke-ism? Players and teams are allowed to emblazon their helmets and end zones with phrases like,

"End Racism" or "It Takes All Of Us?" These subliminal messages are captured by your mind yet are unnoticed by your consciousness.

What if teachers and administrators taught racism? Students are led to believe that people of color are the victims of a white society. What if teachers indoctrinated children to believe they can choose their own sex? Boys can now decide they are girls and share bathrooms and locker rooms with real girls. Boys get to compete with great advantage in girls sports.

If America is so bad, why are people from all around the world clamoring to come here? They seek opportunity and a better life. It's been said, "Evil triumphs when good people do nothing." It's time for you to do something.

Richard Thompson  
Alexandria, MN