

A Celebration of the First Amendment On-Air Talking Points

Provided by the National Association of Broadcasters

On September 25, 1789 – 231 years ago – Congress passed a collection of amendments to the U.S. Constitution that would become the Bill of Rights. Foremost among these is the First Amendment, which provides for the freedom of religion, speech and assembly.

The First Amendment also guarantees the right to a free press. America's Founding Fathers understood that our democracy could not survive without the freedom to report the news without fear or favor. The times may have changed; that principle has not.

Especially during the pivotal events of the past six months, our most-trusted sources of news – our local radio and TV stations and broadcast network partners – have shown how essential a free press is to keeping people informed.

Journalists have done remarkable work to keep their audiences informed during the COVID-19 pandemic, even as stations have had to drastically revamp their operations to create safe workplaces. We have (customize for your station) aired special reports and virtual townhalls to bring audiences expert advice about staying healthy, examined medical research to shine a light on the short- and long-term effects of COVID-19, and documented our own struggles with the virus. Some journalists have even volunteered in vaccine trials.

Journalists have also been in the streets covering the ongoing civil unrest stemming from racial injustice and inequality protests. We are providing a platform to explore the challenges facing our nation, and helping those at home to connect to, learn and understand what is happening in the world. We are bearing witness to interactions between police and demonstrators to hold local officials and citizens accountable.

Since the founding of our nation, America's free press has been entrusted with the awesome responsibility of educating voters, examining the issues, promoting civil debate and holding our public officials accountable. That is a tradition that is alive and well today. Millions of voters are turning to broadcast stations to help make informed choices at the polls during federal, state and local elections in 2020.

When our Founding Fathers passed the First Amendment, they likely could not envision a year as challenging as 2020. Yet, by enshrining the right to a free press in the bedrock of our nation, they showed their faith that journalism was necessary to our democracy's survival even in the toughest of times. That is worth celebrating.