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## Free Speech Week 2018: Facts Are the Language of America

By [David Chavern](#) October 22, 2018



Do you remember what it was like to not be able to get the answer to an elusive question as soon as you asked it? Like how long sea turtles live? Or how far away is the sun? Or the name of that actor from that one movie? Before the omni-present Google and smartphone, these answers were likely missing (or required a lot of work to find). So when these questions came up in the past, conversation would stop.

That's because the language of America is our common understanding of the facts of the world. Knowledge is a type of social currency, allowing us to converse and tackle the problems we collectively face. Without it, no democratic system can continue to function.

These common understandings tie us together. They allow us to communicate effectively and work together. When they are absent or under stress, like they are at this moment in society, it may sometimes feel like we will never recover that common language. But journalists are out there every day on the front lines to uncover the facts and understandings that will allow us to find our way back to a more productive democracy where decisions can be made based on mutually agreed-upon facts.

To fortify and flourish, we need to protect free speech. Journalists must be able to do their jobs without fear of censorship so that readers have unfettered access to the facts. Free speech is our most important tool in challenging abuses of power. It was a team of journalists at the *Indianapolis Star* that broke the Larry Nassar scandal, leading to his imprisonment this year. It was journalists who revealed the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and journalists who dug into Donald Trump's suspected tax schemes. We've witnessed these brave men and women go into storm surges, disasters and war zones to bring us the news.

Yet across the globe, we have also seen egregious attacks on the press. Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi was captured and murdered for practicing his profession; a shooter entered the *Capital Gazette* newsroom, killing five members of their staff; *The Boston Globe* received bomb threats – to name a few. So far, [43 journalists this year](#) have been killed simply for reporting the news. These attacks, while unbelievably tragic in their own right, are also denying citizens their right to be informed. They are silencing the language of America.

This year during Free Speech Week, we must remember the sacrifices of these individuals and demand better protections for the Fourth Estate. The freedom of the press is a fundamental principle of the United States and one we must seek to protect.

The News Media Alliance has joined Reporters Without Borders and other organizations to encourage voters in the U.S. to ask their congressional candidates ahead of the midterm elections where they stand on press freedom. I urge you to speak with your elected officials and work to secure free speech and protections for journalists so that the language of America may thrive.



#### David Chavern

David Chavern serves as President & CEO of the News Media Alliance. Chavern has built a career spanning 30 years in executive strategic and operational roles, and most recently completed a decade-long tenure at the United States Chamber of Commerce.



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