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Why A Free Press Matters In Our Democracy

It is crucial, especially during a global pandemic, that the integrity of a free press be upheld to the highest standard, otherwise the lives of millions could be at stake. I recently experienced firsthand the turmoil that can be caused by the dissemination of misinformation. This past February, I traveled to Italy with a group of students from my high school, just as Coronavirus became the top news story. We arrived home to bullying and false accusations that we were infected with the virus. These rumors sent our community into a full state of panic.

The alarming amount of false information within my community can be mirrored throughout major politics in America today, especially pertaining to President Trump's bullying of the press. A free press fact-checks claims and asks tough questions, which is essential to our country's democratic decision making process. Not only has Trump communicated false information to the press and public on numerous occasions, he has verbally attacked the credibility of the press, referring to media outlets as "fake news" when they report on him in a negative light. Being honest with others and admitting the truth is a lesson most people learn early on. Isn't it appalling that the leader of our country struggles with this concept?

On April 13th, at a White House press briefing, President Trump delivered countless false claims and even played a video attempting to highlight the administration's response to the virus as efficient and almost heroic. The video; however, failed to include any details from Trump's initial devaluation of the virus. This video, drowned in propaganda, was an attempt to rewrite history in Trump's favor, which is simply undemocratic and defies the integrity of a free press.

The foundation of democracy lies within the desires and needs of its citizens, and without a free press to fact-check our President's numerous false statements, the population could be oblivious to the truth. According to CNN, "Trump also falsely claimed he has 'total 'authority over states' Coronavirus restrictions, falsely claimed he had inherited broken Coronavirus tests..." The list goes on and on.

The First Amendment provides there be no law prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging of the freedom of speech or press, but Trump's effort to undercut the media is no secret. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, in an interview with Leslie Stahl, Trump said, "I do it to discredit you all and demean you all, so that, when you write negative stories about me, no one will believe you." How can a democracy run effectively when citizens' knowledge of current events are distorted by false information, or as Trump seems to desire, no information at all?

With lives at stake, it is crucial that the public be correctly informed. My experience with the false statements made against me has only sparked my increased desire for the press to continue to set the record straight. The voice of the free press in America cannot be silenced.