

Written Testimony Submitted by Andy Ngo

to the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

Remote Briefing on

“The First Amendment Under Attack: Examining Government Violence Against Peaceful Civil Rights Protesters and the Journalists Covering Them”

June 29, 2020

10:00 a.m. E.T. via WebEx

Thank you Chairwoman Maloney, ranking member Jordan and committee members.

I am a journalist who reports on American political violence and street protests. In the course of my work, I've been severely injured and criminally harassed for documenting public demonstrations. However, the violence against myself as well as other journalists have not come from law enforcement but rather the protesters we're covering.¹ The subject bringing us together at this briefing is important. There are endless examples of public servants harming the very people they're meant to serve—but it is an incomplete picture to only focus on injuries perpetrated by law enforcement during the past month of riots. From coast to coast, American cities have been convulsed with violent protests that have claimed over two-dozen lives, injured hundreds and cost hundreds of millions in damages. Over-policing didn't cause this, under-policing did.

My work primarily covers the Pacific Northwest. In Portland, Ore., violent protests have continued for more than 30 days even though it has ebbed elsewhere in the country. Like in many cities, law enforcement here is routinely demonized by the public and elected officials. I reported earlier this year for *Newsweek* how the mainstreaming of police hatred in Portland has created a culture of passive policing and a tolerance of criminal mob behavior.² Who suffers the most? Law-abiding citizens and yes, journalists too.

On the evening of 29 May, 2020, violent rioting spread to Portland in the wake of the killing of George Floyd. After rioters stormed and set fire to the ground floor of the Justice Center, which

¹ Luery, *KCRA Reporter Caught in Protest Violence*; “KTVU Reporter Assaulted While Covering Protest in Berkeley — U.S. Press Freedom Tracker”; Vespa, “Local CBS Reporter Assaulted By Anti-Racism Protester A Day After Charlottesville Chaos”; “Antifa Protesters Couldn't Find Any Fascists at Unite the Right — and Harassed the Press Instead”; Shepherd and Shepherd, “Police Crackdown Sends a Woman to the Hospital, But Portland Avoids Unhinged Violence in Protester Showdown.”

² Ngo, “Why Portland Police Stand By Passively When Leftists Riot.”

houses the Central Police Precinct and the Sheriff's Office, they turned their rage to businesses downtown. In a span of five hours, they destroyed and looted countless businesses with impunity. They started numerous fires as well.³ You could hear the distant sirens of the police but no one would show up. In one night, nearly \$5m in damages occurred.⁴ Downtown Portland remains boarded up one month later.

Portland Police have since been stripped of the ability to use tear gas in nearly all circumstances by the city council. The Seattle City Council did the same to their police force. Videos and narratives devoid of context painted police as brutal while ignoring the violent criminal behaviors of those in the crowd. Police in Portland and Seattle, like elsewhere, have sustained serious injuries from rocks, bricks, concrete chunks, IEDs and more.⁵ I've witnessed how—while shouting “peaceful protest”—violent agitators from the crowd blind officers with lasers or paint balls before throwing projectiles at them.⁶

In New York, nearly 400 officers were injured in a two-week period.⁷ 150 local and federal officers were injured in Washington D.C. in a week.⁸ 130 officers in Chicago were injured in a 48-hour period.⁹ In Las Vegas, Officer Shay Mikalonis was shot in the head and is now paralyzed.¹⁰ In Oakland, extremists used the cover of protests to shoot two federal officers, killing Dave Underwood.¹¹

In Seattle this month, police abandoned their East Precinct following political pressure. This allowed thousands to occupy the neighborhood and establish their own so-called “autonomous zone.” It was guarded by their armed militias. When I was there undercover, I received manuals describing how to use protesters as human shields and cover. The anarchy in Seattle quickly devolved into deadly violence while those who live and work in the area have limited to no access to law enforcement.

The First Amendment is paramount but street protests must be constrained by the rule of law. Otherwise, we have anarchy, violence and death. Police cannot target the media but journalists have to follow police health and safety orders.¹²

³ Portland Police Public Information Office, “PPB and PF&R Release Information On Fires Near Downtown (Photo).”

⁴ Manning and The Oregonian/OregonLive, “Downtown Retailers Still Reeling from Fiery Riot and City's Meek Response: 'It Was Chaos.'”

⁵ Portland Police Public Information Office, “Chief Chuck Lovell's Statement on Ongoing Demonstrations and Impacts.”

⁶ Portland Police Public Information Office, “Update: Arrest Information for June 25th Demonstrations (Photo).”

⁷ Winter and Dienst, “Nearly 400 NYPD Cops Hurt During NYC's Two Weeks of Protest Over George Floyd's Death.”

⁸ “VERIFY: How Many Officers Were Injured in the First Week of Protests in DC?”

⁹ “George Floyd Protests: 1,258 Arrested, 130 Police Officers Injured in Chicago.”

¹⁰ The Associated Press, “Police Officer Shot during Las Vegas Protest Paralyzed.”

¹¹ “Authorities Identify Federal Officer Killed in Oakland during George Floyd Protest.”

¹² “For Reporters Confronted by Police, Some Common Sense Tips - The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press.”

This is personal for me. While covering a Portland demonstration in June 2019, antifa organized an assault on me within view of the police—who did not intervene. They beat me repeatedly and so severely I had to be hospitalized. I was diagnosed with a brain hemorrhage, among other injuries. Since then, I have been harassed and stalked further by people connected to the same criminal organization. I have even seen some of them in recent weeks in other cities. America is experiencing the consequences of police in retreat because of biased media narratives and poor leadership. This has allowed violent extremists to cloak themselves under the banner of “peaceful protest” to carry-out widespread arson, shootings, looting and property destruction. George Floyd deserves justice. But so do countless Americans victimized by the riots.

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