

OPINION

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EDITORIAL

Blocking
the press also
blocks the truth

Journalists are not the story in Uvalde. They are there to tell the story of Uvalde, following a tragedy that will always remain beyond comprehension.

Their pictures and words bring context, insight and understanding to the immeasurable depths of sorrow, despair and outrage following the murders of 19 children and two teachers May 24 at Robb Elementary School.

Journalists are in Uvalde because so many in the public cannot be there. Their questions are the public's questions. Their pursuit is to learn the truth about what happened, sharing facts with the public about this tragedy and, in turn, cultivating a shared understanding.

This means intimate portraits of the victims and their grieving loved ones, questioning law enforcement officials about their response to the shooting, questioning state officials about their statements in the aftermath of tragedy, analyzing the killer's intent and background, questioning officials about past and future policies.

It's disturbing that law enforcement and motorcycle clubs have hassled, intimidated and obstructed journalists, including those with the San Antonio Express-News, as they cover this tragedy, moving the press from public streets and sidewalks, blocking cameras and creating barricades.

"The news reporters are about getting to the truth, and that's why they're being obstructed and treated poorly, because there are some folks, apparently, who don't want the truth to come out," Kelley Shannon, executive director for the Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas, told us. "The press is symbolic for the truth, really, in this situation. And if they're being harassed, and they're being blocked, and they're being mistreated, well, that's because there is some blockage of the truth going on, and it's just a misplaced agitation that's being aimed at journalists."

Let's be clear: Journalists have been respectful of private citizens and this grieving community. They have covered the tragedy with sensitivity and humanity.

They have also asked pointed questions of public officials, as the narrative of the police response has shifted with time. It is vitally important for the residents of Uvalde to have a full understanding of the facts of this tragedy. It's vitally important for the nation to have accurate information about this tragedy as federal and state officials debate responses.

Would that happen without the presence of journalists? Of course not. Just look at how the narrative of

the police response shifted under questioning.

The public is best served with the communication of clear and accurate information from a reliable official source, and that has not happened in Uvalde. Instead, the public has incrementally learned that officers, under the direction of Pedro "Pete" Arredondo, chief of police for the Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District, did not enter adjoining classrooms for more than an hour, even as the killer fired sporadic shots and children were calling for help. We also have learned a teacher did not leave a door propped open, contrary to initial statements.

As funerals of the victims continue, law enforcement officials from across the state have descended on Uvalde, under the command of Dilley Police Chief Homer Delgado.

When officers (funded by tax dollars) order reporters off sidewalks or obstruct photographers from taking pictures in public settings, they may be speaking to specific journalists, but they are really removing the public.

News gathering is a constitutionally protected activity, and such threats have the potential to chill reporting. If journalists are threatened with an arrest for standing on a public street, for example, they are less likely to report and that is information that won't reach the public.

In Uvalde there is also the obvious tension of police shutting out journalists, who have raised pointed questions about the flawed police response to the tragedy, a response that officials initially praised.

How reporters are treated is important, and public officials and agencies always benefit from transparency, even if it reveals missteps. But what's most important is getting to the truth about May 24 in Uvalde. That's why journalists are there. To antagonize the press distracts from this higher purpose, and it ultimately clouds public understanding.



YOUR TURN

O'Rourke's courage needed

Re: "Real leaders don't act like Beto O'Rourke," Other Views, June 2:
Thanks to Democratic gubernatorial candidate Beto O'Rourke for his righteous indignation as he confronted Gov. Greg Abbott and others at a press conference on the shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde. He acted as a real leader as he spoke truth to power.

The people of Uvalde also seem angry as they ask why nothing was or is done about these shootings. Abbott was also booed during a visit to the memorial at the school.

This governor and Republicans in Texas do nothing. They delay action until we switch to another issue in the news. The Republicans in Washington are equally to blame. This is why I appreciate O'Rourke and others like state Sen. Roland Gutierrez who are trying to speak out and raise the questions that people have. This is what good leaders must do.

O'Rourke in his campaign to unseat Abbott genuinely fights for the change needed in Texas. Several people have said they will support O'Rourke because of his courage and compassion.

Kathy Mariella

Count me in, Beto!

Re: "Act like Beto — a leader," Your Turn, Monday:
Kudos to letter writer Tom Hoskins. That could be a great rallying cry — Count me in, Beto!

Pat Ferguson, Universal City

Slow access, reduce killing

I have read that "an ounce of preven-

tion is worth a pound of cure."

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick wants \$50 million for police shields, Sen. Ted Cruz wants single door entry, someone else wants to arm (and minimally train) teachers, Gov. Greg Abbott wants to spend more for mental health.

How much would it cost to raise the minimum age or tax the weapons of war and the ammunition at a much higher rate? These politicians must know that it is still people with guns killing other people. Even slowing down their access can reduce this killing madness.

Please help stop this madness.

John B. Francis



Robin Jerstad/Contributor

A reader says people will support Beto O'Rourke because he is fighting for needed change.

GUIDELINES FOR LETTERS

Send letters to: Letters@express-news.net. Letters may also be mailed to Letters, Express-News, P.O. Box 217, San Antonio, TX 78297. Include your address and daytime phone number. Length? The shorter, the better — long enough to make your point. All letters are subject to editing for length and clarity.

ANOTHER VIEW

Coping strategies can prevent, ease trauma

By Vanessa C. Cantu
FOR THE EXPRESS-NEWS

How do we make sense of what happened to those students and teachers in Uvalde or any of the other mass killings

that have occurred recently? What makes someone commit an act of violence?

There are so many questions, yet no single answer. I have been a licensed professional counselor and school counselor for nearly two decades. I've worked with thousands of people — in my private practice and in the school setting — who have lived with a mental health issue.

The majority of my students and clients never succumbed to violence, self-inflicted or to others.

Was this because they received counseling as an intervention? Perhaps.

I believe a variety of factors contribute to someone becoming violent. The big ones in-

clude growing up in a violent environment, whether at home or school. Some do what they learn. They become violent because they feel mistreated and take out their pain on others.

Violent people lack healthy coping strategies. I always tell people I work with that it is not the emotion that is the problem, as they are human and allowed to feel what they feel. The problem is the reaction. One person chooses to cry and scream into a pillow, while another slams their fist into a wall. Resiliency is key, the ability to "bounce back" from any challenge in life. Some people seem to be naturals, while others need to be taught how to effectively face life situations.

Violence to the extreme of killing people is a whole other level. That is someone who has been harboring rage for a long period of time. Working through that, or what therapists like to call "processing," would include extensive therapy to peel through those layers of hurt.



Tamir Kalifa/New York Times

The mass shooting in Uvalde won't define the community. Its response to this tragedy will.

I hear people talking about their stance on the gun control-versus-mental health debate. I understand everyone has their own perspective, one based on values and experiences. To be fair, both sides are absolutely right.

Mental health is huge. My practice has thrived, especially during the pandemic as anxi-

ety has soared to new heights. People are hurting, for different reasons, and sometimes receiving therapeutic treatment is necessary for them to work through their struggles.

As for guns, I get how someone raised around them or has learned to use them properly may have an affinity for them. I have no problem

with that.

The issue for me is when a person who is not in the right state of mind has access to a weapon, gun or otherwise. Whenever I assess someone who is suicidal, I always ask, "Do you have access to a weapon?" as I know that the likelihood of using it to hurt themselves increases. If I were assessing someone for homicidal intent, I'd ask the same thing.

As I provide grief counseling and support for the community members of Uvalde, I write this piece with a heavy heart. What I have learned is that Uvalde is home to generations of families who are strong in faith and community. They are devastated, but they are leaning on each other for support. What I have witnessed is that Uvalde is strong. This horrible act of violence won't define the community. Their tenacity in the face of sorrow will.

Vanessa C. Cantu is a licensed professional counselor and crisis intervention counselor for a local school district.