



**Office of the County Executive
STEUART PITTMAN**

June 28, 2021

Comments on the Dedication of the Guardians of the First Amendment Memorial

I thought a lot about what to say today. I needed to sort through a lot of very strong opinions, about the attack on our newspaper - about the loss of Gerald, Rob, John, Rebecca, and Wendi - about this country's failure to confront its epidemic of gun violence - about the value of journalism as a profession - about the healthy impact of local newspapers on local government - and about the means by which Alden Global Capital, our newspaper's brand new owner, grows the wealth of its investors.

I put many of those thoughts in a letter, and I sent it to Alden's leaders. I hoped that they would join us today.

I hope that they will visit this community soon. I hope that their stockholders hear our story, and work with us to grow, rather than shrink, our newspaper. And if they don't, I hope that we can find a way to recreate what they take away from us.

We need a damn paper.

Like many of you, I get angry about these things. Anger can feed activism, good activism, and that is a path to progress.

But to me, this memorial and this gathering are not about anger or activism. When I look at this structure and when I look at your faces - I know, and you know, that we must heal.

We must heal ourselves and we must heal each other. We know that's what our five fallen heroes would want, and we know that it's what we want.

A trusted news source - I think it was National Public Radio - reported a few years back on a study that showed the power of gratitude. It presented evidence that feeling and expressing gratitude improves health and wellness. It can actually heal us.

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We are surrounded today by people who have earned our gratitude. So let's try it. Let's thank them, not just with words, but with our hearts.

We are grateful for Gerald Fischman, Rob Hiaasen, John McNamara, Rebecca Smith, and Wendi Winters, for the work they did and the lives they lived.

We are grateful for the ones who loved these five heroes and were loved by them, for putting one foot in front of the other and walking, for keeping them alive in your hearts, and for doing what you can to prevent the next killing.

We are grateful to all of the 2018 candidates for public office who responded to the Capital's call for answers to the question - what will you do to prevent the next shooting - and to the Capital staff for bravely asking that question.

We are grateful to our brave police officers, our crisis intervention teams, our firefighters, our deputy sheriffs, our office of emergency management and everyone else who rushed to 888 Bestgate on June 28 three years ago, hoping to save lives and heal the wounded.

We are grateful to Paul Gillespie for the photographs that are displayed right now at the Michael E. Busch Library - Images that speak more eloquently than any of us will today.

We are grateful to the leaders and the members of the Chesapeake News Guild, for bringing together the people who work so hard to produce our local papers and speaking truth to power, seeking no more than a livable wage and respect.

We are grateful to Stewart Bainum and others - for trying to transfer our Capital Gazette and our beloved partner, the Baltimore Sun, to non-profit local management.

We are grateful to all the journalists who have served our community through their work at the Capital. Thank you for your service.

We are so, so grateful, for so many reasons, to the man who became the heart of this newspaper, and gave his heart to this newspaper, and this community. We are so grateful for Rick Hutzell.

And we are grateful to all journalists everywhere, who work so hard for so little, to uncover truth and spread it across the land.

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Finally, we will forever be grateful, as will residents and visitors to this place for many generations, to the people who conceived of this memorial and made it happen: to Carl Snowden and the Caucus of African American Leaders for the vision and the coordination of this effort,

to Governor Hogan and our District 30 delegation for the investment of state dollars,

to Mayor Buckley and his team for providing this site and financial support, and

to the taxpayers of Anne Arundel County for their generous investment.

This memorial will help to heal us. It will inspire us.

We are grateful.

Sincerely,



Steuart Pittman
County Executive

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