

Ben Jacobs Trial Statement – June 12, 2017

On May 24th, 2017, I was doing my job. I am a reporter. I asked then candidate Gianforte a question about the most important issue of the day: the cost of the Republican health care plan. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office had just released its cost estimate. Mr. Gianforte had repeatedly stated that he needed to see this figure before he could decide whether he supported a massive proposal to reshape one sixth of the U.S. economy.

I asked Mr. Gianforte a question in the same manner I have asked questions of hundreds of politicians: congressmen, senators and even the man who is now our president. Mr. Gianforte's response was to slam me to the floor and start punching me. He injured my elbow, broke my glasses and thrust me into a national spotlight I did not seek or desire. Mr Gianforte then lied in a defamatory public statement in which he insisted that his unprovoked physical attack was somehow my fault.

Weeks passed and I then received a written apology from Congressman-elect Gianforte. He accepted his responsibility for his assault and his defamation. He acknowledged the importance of the free press and made a thoughtful contribution to protect journalists across the world. I have accepted his apology and fully expect his thoughtful words to be followed by concrete actions once he has taken his seat in Congress. I am confident that he will be a strong advocate for a free press and the First Amendment. And I even hope to be able to finally interview him once he has arrived on Capitol Hill.

If this incident were simply between myself and the Congressman-elect, that would be one thing. However, it has had national ramifications on our politics and our culture. While I have no doubt that actions like these were an aberration for Congressman-elect Gianforte personally, I worry that, in context of our political debate, they have become increasingly common. In recent years, our discourse has grown increasingly rancorous and our debate increasingly vile. This needs to stop.

There will always be fundamental political disagreements in our society. However, these need not become personal and certainly should never

become violent. I hope this court's decision can send a strong message about the necessity of civil discourse and the important role of the free press and to help heal our political system.