



# ***MORTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT***

*Kyle L. Kirchmeier, Sheriff*



## **News Release**

For Immediate Release

October 19, 2016

Contact: Morton County PIO (701) 426-1587

### **Protesters Exhibit Escalated Violent Behavior as Journalists Threatened**

Mandan, N.D. -- Morton County authorities are investigating an attack against three journalists which occurred Tuesday, October 18, 2016 in the main camp occupied by individuals protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline.

The three journalists covered protest activity on Monday. According to the journalists, they were invited to the camp to interview those in the camp Tuesday morning.

Officers have reviewed the video recorded by the journalists which depicts how the situation escalated into a very threatening and terrifying situation for the three individuals. The male reporter was interviewing a group of individuals at the camp. It is apparent by watching the video of the interview that the individuals got offended by a line of questioning. One individual who identified himself as camp security tried to grab the reporter's microphone and dragged the reporter who would not let go of his equipment.

"The journalists made their way back to the vehicle. However, protesters blocked them in by surrounding their vehicle with people and vehicles. Individuals are seen pounding on the journalist's vehicles and rocking it," said Morton County Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier. "Protesters demanded the journalists turn over their video footage. Numerous times the journalists pleaded with protesters to "let them leave."

The journalists called 9-1-1 for help, during the call you can hear the frantic plea for help. The journalists told our Morton County investigators they were, "scared for their life."

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According to the interview with our investigation team, the journalists were fearful of putting their vehicle into park for fear that this would unlock their doors. They eventually were allowed to drive toward the camp entrance. However, camp security closed the gate and blocked them from leaving.

Officers responded to the camp and using a PA asked individuals in the camp to allow the journalists leave. The officer told the media the female journalist was terrified. The journalists were escorted to the Morton County Law Enforcement Center where they were interviewed. Morton County authorities will be investigating this incident for possible charges.

“What is concerning is that these journalists have the same rights as those protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline. This incident occurred on public property, the violent, illegal behavior exhibited towards the journalists is unacceptable and will be investigated,” said Kirchmeier.

Authorities are asking for assistance in identifying individuals involved in the incident along with anyone who may has additional information to call the Morton County Sheriff's Department at 701-667-3224.

This is not the first time media crews have been harassed by protesters. Just last week, a local TV crew was surrounded and threatened by individuals at a protest site.

“We are concerned and the community should be concerned about the escalation in tactics and individuals with prior criminal histories coming in from out of state to cause fear and terror,” said Kirchmeier.

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A recent analysis of criminal backgrounds illustrates the heightened threat of escalated violent behaviors in the camp and at any protest events. There have been 142 protesters arrested in connection with anti-pipeline riots and protests. Just 12% of those protesters are from North Dakota, while the other 125 are from out-of-state.

- 43 of the arrested protesters have a total of 276 previous citations and charges for illegal activity.
- Eleven protesters have a history of driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Five protesters have been previously cited or arrested for drug possession.
- Six protesters have a history of violence including domestic violence and child abuse.
- Seven arrested protesters have a history of theft, robbery, or burglary.

“The folks who want to legally and peacefully protest should be especially concerned for their safety inside of these camps. The leaders of these camps and protests should think about the individuals they let in,” said Kirchmeier.

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