

MEDIA BIAS IS PALPABLE

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the latest example of media bias:

President Trump is being slammed by pundits for accusing the *Washington Post* of media bias in a story about comments made by Robert Redfield, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Trump is right and the pundits are wrong. Moreover, we at the Catholic League have experienced the exact same kind of palpable media bias on many occasions.

The headline in the *Washington Post* story in question read, "CDC Director Warns Second Wave Of Coronavirus Is Likely To Be Even More Devastating." Redfield never said that. He said that a potential second wave later this year, when combined with the seasonal flu, would make it more difficult to handle. He defended himself yesterday. "I didn't say that this was going to be worse, I said it was going to be more difficult and potentially complicated because we'll have flu and coronavirus circulating at the same time."

Critics of Trump are saying that within the story, the *Washington Post* quoted the CDC director accurately; Redfield himself admits this is true. But this misses the point: the headline was false.

Headlines are read by more people than stories are—they shape public opinion in ways that are much more powerful than the actual story. This is especially true in our information-saturated society. Most people are time pressed and their take away from news articles is more likely to be affected by headlines than the story itself.

We see this at the Catholic League all the time. How many times have we seen negative headlines about a priest, only to realize—several paragraphs later—that he is Episcopalian? Then

there are the negative headlines about a priest who, we learn in the story, is an ex-priest. One of my favorites is a negative headline about a cop or fireman—we see this often—that just happens to mention he is an ex-altar boy.

Last October, I criticized *USA Today* for running a headline that said, “The Catholic Church and Boy Scouts are Lobbying Against Child Abuse Statutes.” In point of fact, the Catholic Church was lobbying against laws that applied only to the private sector, giving the public schools a free pass.

On January 4, 2020, the CBS affiliate in St. Petersburg, Florida, WTSP, posted a story titled, “‘It’s Disheartening’: Former Catholic Church Abuse Victim Says Local Bishop Could Have More Victims.” The bishop, however, was Protestant. After I criticized the station, it apologized.

Headlines matter. Regrettably, those who write them are typically not those who write the story. Sensationalism is what drives many in the media, not truth. It’s a national disgrace.