

# Unconstitutional Arrest of Independent Journalists, Including Don Lemon and Georgia Fort, Fits Lawless Pattern of Escalation by Trump Administration

JANUARY 30, 2026



PRESS RELEASE



A live projection across from the Washington location of FCC Chairman Brendan Carr's Dec. 3 speech.

Craig Aaron

## 'These latest arrests are just the latest in a long line of First Amendment violations by the Trump administration.'

WASHINGTON and U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi ordered the arrest of former CNN anchor Don Lemon and Minneapolis journalist Georgia Fort. Federal agents have since arrested the two alongside local public officials.

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Don Lemon and Georgia Fort are both independent journalists who have been covering the community response to ICE and Border Patrol violence in Minnesota. Fort went live on Facebook early Friday morning to share that agents were at her door to take her into custody. Her attorney **confirmed** (<https://www.startribune.com/journalists-georgia-fort-don-lemon-arrested-over-protest-during-st-paul-church-service/601573975>) to *The Minnesota Star Tribune* that they were federal law enforcement agents.

Also arrested were local political candidates Trahern Jeen Crews and Jamael Lydell Lundy. The government alleges that Lemon and Fort violated federal law while engaged in the constitutionally protected activity of covering a Jan. 18 protest inside St. Paul church. The federal government's case for arresting Lemon had been rejected last week by a magistrate judge.

At least three community members have also been arrested for their participation in the protest, including Minneapolis civil rights attorney Nekima Levy Armstrong, St. Paul school board member Cauntyll Allen, and military veteran William Kelly. The protest was organized to demand that one of the church's pastors resign from his position leading the local ICE field office.

Free Press Action Advocacy Director **Jenna Ruddock** said:

"As the Trump administration's all-out assault on Minnesota continues, the First Amendment remains in its crosshairs. While journalists and civilians continue to heroically document conditions on the ground in the face of escalating violence from federal agents, the Trump administration is using every weapon at its disposal to shut down efforts to document, report and dissent.

"The First Amendment protects acts of protest and acts of journalism equally. The criminalization of both journalists and protesters serves the same authoritarian project: shutting down dissenting voices or any content that deviates from the official narrative. These actions should outrage our leading media organizations, our elected officials and the public alike.

"These latest arrests are just the latest in a long line of First Amendment violations by the Trump administration. Too often, corporate media have readily capitulated to the administration's demands. Independent journalists, on the other hand, are continuing to lead by example with their critical reporting under increasingly unsafe conditions – indeed, with targets on their backs.

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“The charges against Don Lemon and Georgia Fort must be dropped, along with the charges against Nakima Levy, Cauntyll Allen, and all other demonstrators arrested in Minneapolis for exercising the First Amendment rights.

“But that’s just a start. In order to ensure that our essential constitutional rights are protected, Congress needs to exercise oversight of the Department of Justice by calling Attorney General Bondi before Congress; reintroduce and pass the PRESS Act; reform the Espionage Act; and reassert everyone’s right to record so those engaged in acts of journalism aren’t immediate targets for state violence and crackdowns.”

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