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■ In my opinion

Meatier Media

Alarmists have for decades now proclaimed the decline of the newspaper and forecasted its eventual demise. It's heading in that direction: In 1990, America had 268 daily newspapers with circulation over 50,000 (43 of those had circulation numbers over 250,000). In 2003, there were 217 and 36 papers, respectively. The trend is an old one: In 1950, 1.23 daily newspapers were sold per household; in 2000, that number was 0.53.

The likeliest culprit is television: Not only a competing medium, its erosion of the American attention span leaves increasingly busy media-consumers much less inclined to zigzag their eyes down line after line of black-on-gray copy.

Worse, newspapers seem to have fallen out of touch with the consumer. When a January 2002 Pew poll asked which medium best covered the news, 38 percent named cable television and 29 percent named network or local television news, while only 10 percent named newspapers.

However slow or incomplete the decline, future historians might recall the late 20th century as the twilight of the daily news rag gods.

But the empire of televised news may be a short-lived one, as newer media move to inhabit niches unfilled by older ones (say, blogging) and overtake older media where it does a



TRAVIS WILLSE
RIVALLESS WIT

better job (up-to-the-minute special interest news). In 1994, 40.7 million Americans watched the ABC, NBC or CBS nightly newscast; by November 2004, only 29.3 million did.

Some of these inroads are no doubt due to the proliferation of cable and the Internet. After all, television cannot conceivably replace the spontaneity, casualness or everyman involvement of the blogosphere.

But if it's facing stiff competition, television isn't helping itself much: Viewers who track the news for entertainment fluff have little reason not to dial up to VH1 for an I-love-this-decade-for-which-I-am-unjustifiably-nostalgic special or to E!'s mind-bogglingly bad Michael Jackson trial reenactments. (CNN has even devoted undue time to the continued de-throning of the King of Pop in its broadcasts and on its Web site.)

Meanwhile, television news has largely abandoned those people interested in stories that take more than two minutes to hash out in

favor of more digestible material. If newspapers are struggling on account of attention span, television news might soon suffer from self-induced irrelevance.

For all the trouble with attention spans and, more recently, credibility, further decline of the evening news is bad for the consumer. After all, television is a potent and vibrant medium. But just as the definition of the medium prevents it from replacing blogs, it guarantees that it cannot be duplicated. Neither blogs nor newspapers nor "podcasts" can manage the combined impressive production, raw visual stimulation, and the ability to do "journalism by show and tell" that television does so well.

If television news wants to compete with the newer and more agile media (and, for that matter, the older, more tangible media like newspapers), it ought to capitalize on these exclusive features. Use big-company resources to track more angles of a story. Give media consumers in-depth, visual discussion of stories and concepts that are difficult to flatten to the newspaper page or blog entry, and the evening news viewers may return.

Short of that, I'd still be willing to tune in more often if there was no more Michael Jackson.

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INBOX

Commentator defunding does not limit free speech

With all this talk lately about the Commentator's funding, I haven't heard a couple things addressed. First of all, saying defunding it violates free speech is not right. Does the concept of free speech include that it must be publicly funded? Just because you withdraw public funds from a publication doesn't mean you are saying they can't say what they want. If there is a sizable group that likes what they have to say then they will find a way to fund it privately. It is actually quite communistic to force everyone to fund such a publication.

Another thing you have been promoting is viewpoint neutrality. I fail to see why the decision to publicly fund such a strongly opinionated publication should be viewpoint neutral. All students paying fees have viewpoints, and we certainly care what our money is going to support. The idea is not that student government is viewpoint neutral, but that it represents the overall viewpoints of its constituents. While that could threaten to stifle minority voice, minority voices need to find their own way to be funded.

Ideally, nobody should be forced to fund something they disagree with, but when you fund a minority, more people are being forced against

their will than if you fund a majority. I have my own radical opinions. Does that mean it is wrong for the PFC to deny me money to print out and distribute my opinions? Or does this concept only apply to old and established publications. Well, in that case, it doesn't seem to promote diversity as much anymore, does it?

Guru Rattan Khalsa
Undergraduate

College Republicans show lack of compassion

Lately, I've come to hate the College Republicans. This is a feeling I'm uncomfortable with. I mean, liberals are supposed to respect people of different backgrounds, right? Well, some may disagree with that statement in light of recent attacks on the First Amendment rights of the Oregon Commentator. But I try to apply that open-minded, love everyone, hippie ideal to my liberal self, so this recent Republican hate thing is unnerving.

I was sitting in the EMU when I noticed a handmade sign the College Republicans put up at their table: "Peace Through Superior Firepower," with little bombs drawn on it. I'm sure my dad, who survived a war and genocide, wouldn't find this so funny. Only privileged war-free Americans like the College Republicans could find that sign remotely humorous. Then I read a quote from the Oregon

Commentator attributed to a former prominent member of the College Republicans: "Let me tell you something. There's nothing better in the world than a Thai whore."

Wow. Obviously these people come from various political backgrounds. So, compassionate conservatives, I know you're out there. Come find me. We'll strike up a dialogue on what grassroots efforts we can make to make the world a better place. And you'll help me feel better about Republicans.

Sermin Yesilada
Undergraduate

LTD riders, turn to bikes for alternative transport

In reading your cover story about the LTD strike, I noticed that no attention was paid to the wide variety of biking options available to campus students. Eugene has an extensive network of bike lanes and pathways, and is an extremely accessible town by bicycle. It is mostly flat, laid out in a grid of streets and peopled with bike-friendly drivers. So take advantage of the nonexistent winter, support local bike shops and explore Eugene by bike. It's almost free, is a great form of outside exercise and is good for the spirit as well. Enjoy the early spring and bike Eugene!

Sam Fox
Corvallis

CORRECTION

The Emerald story "Wrap it up" on March 4 attributed the paragraph that stated 50 percent of new HIV cases each year are diagnosed in people ages 15 to 25 to Kelsea Michael. It should have been attributed to Niki Martin. The Emerald regrets the error.

■ Editorial

Bush's U.N. appointment irrational, antagonistic

The Bush administration seems to believe that if something isn't American then it must be un-American. They see working collaboratively with other nations to address the world's problems as a burdensome exercise utterly beneath them. They exhibit such arrogance when it comes to foreign relations that it has led to diplomatic disaster after diplomatic disaster, leaving Americans isolated from the rest of the world.

President Bush's latest action in his quest to antagonize every country on the globe came Monday when he named John Bolton as his ambassador to the United Nations. Jesse Helms has described Bolton as "the kind of man with whom I would want to stand at the gates of Armageddon." We are not sure what that means, but we do know that Helms might get a chance to do just that, if Bolton has his way. He is another unilateralist hawk, in the mold of Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz and Cheney, who absolutely despises the United Nations. Bolton said in 1994, "If the U.N. secretary building in New York lost 10 stories, it wouldn't make a bit of difference."

Bolton has also said that "the happiest moment of my government service" was when he signed a letter to the U.N. rejecting the International Criminal Court. One of his high-ranking peers has described him as "an anti-diplomat who tries to intimidate those who disagree with his views."

But you would have no idea about Bolton's unilateral agenda if you listen to the propaganda coming from the White House. Press Secretary Scott McClellan said on Monday, "The person that he has selected to nominate to the position of ambassador to the United Nations is someone that shares the President's strong commitment to making sure that multilateral organizations are effective."

Right. Here is a perfect example of his strong commitment, from Bolton's appearance on "The O'Reilly Factor": "I believe ... our foreign policy should support American interests. Let the rest of the world support the rest of the world's interests."

This is a beautiful summarization of the Bush administration's screwed-up view of our role in the world. No wonder Bush frittered away the ground swell of world support following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Our unilateral actions in Iraq have garnered us many enemies and more casualties than was necessary.

And during the election, when John Kerry discussed how he would restore America's place as the most powerful and most respected nation in the world, the Bush attack machine distorted his words and impugned Kerry's patriotism. As disgusting as it was, it was a brilliant political move for the Republicans, who fully recognize how jingoistic and navel-gazing most Americans are.

The United Nations has made many mistakes over the years, but the very act of world leaders sitting in a room together is valuable. America is certainly the sole superpower, but even we cannot afford to continue the international isolation that has defined the last four years. Unfortunately, with Bolton at the helm, we can expect many more years of us against the world.

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