



# We won't give up on truth and free speech

Remember when the phrase “alternative facts” was laughably absurd? It was the term coined by a White House spokesperson a few days after the Trump administration took office – way back when lying about the size of the inauguration audience was the most pressing item on the agenda.

Today, the assault by the president against the pillars of journalism and the public’s right to know has become far more sinister than we could have imagined.

## EDITORIAL

Today, we’re told by this president not to believe what we are seeing. We’re told we’re being lied to by reporters. We’re warned not to believe so-called “fake news” – defined evidentially as

any reports that counter the message from the White House.

“What you’re seeing and what you’re reading is not what’s happening,” Donald Trump has told the American public. “The fake news media,” he tweeted referring to major news outlets, “is the enemy of the American people.”

That demands a response.

This editorial is part of a coordinated response to the statements and posture taken by the president to topple one of our nation’s defining virtues of democracy: a free press.

The Boston Globe has called on editorial boards across the country to speak out against the president’s unwarranted condemnation of the media industry – regardless of their politics. Street Roots is proud to join this campaign.

Because the statements of this president are not in the vein of past criticisms that can, in actuality, serve to strengthen the integrity and responsibility of the Fourth Estate. In fact, the narrative from this White House is not criticism at all, but propaganda from the highest pulpit in the land. It has become cliché to quote George Orwell’s “1984,” but it is so painfully relevant: “The party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was the final, most essential command.”

Essential, because rejecting facts means rejecting accountability for those in power. It means rejecting the rule of law and our Constitution. And where do we go from there?

But we believe most people understand the role of a free press in holding those in power accountable and keeping our government responsible and responsive to the American people. We know that without that local watchdog, Oregonians would be denied information and

understanding on issues important to them, including how our school district deals with teachers accused of misconduct and lead in its drinking water. Because of hardworking journalists we learned of the crisis in our foster care system, the gutting of our environment, and the crippling cycles of poverty and homelessness. And we have the knowledge to do something about it.

We can add our voices to the #MeToo movement and Black Lives Matter, and we can mourn Michael Brown. We can push for real reforms to our police forces and in our courtrooms, and demand that tax dollars spent in our name reflect our true needs and values.

We can demand an end to separating children from their parents as they seek asylum at the border.

We can cast an educated vote.

And taken as a whole, we grow to learn the difference between what’s real and what’s fake.

There can be no doubt that the anti-truth and anti-media campaign by this administration has empowered those who peddle in lies and fear accountability. Hate groups have proliferated in our nation in the past three years. The Southern Poverty Law Center now puts the number of groups at nearly 1,000. These groups thrive in a world without the challenge of fact checkers. They troll their targets online and attack in packs. Entire online platforms have been created to host openly racist, homophobic and Islamophobic positions.

In this environment, you can’t dismiss the president’s rhetoric as simply hyperbole.

It’s almost impossible for most of us to imagine our country without a free press. However, millions of people around the world live in that reality, where dictatorships and oligarchs control the narrative and the masses are kept in the dark. Not here.

From the earliest days of this country, the press has been something people love to hate. It will always be, and we can deal with that. The press itself demands a critical eye and accountability. It’s a two-way street. The goal should be to refine the process toward truth and clarity, not clear the way for more lies.

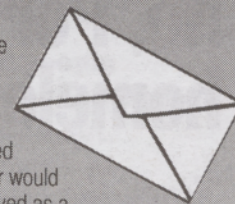
In America, public discourse, freedom of speech and a free press are fundamental – essential – to our democracy, and we must continue to fight for them.

Which brings us back to George Orwell. Orwell wrote “1984” having witnessed the horrors of two world wars, the rise of fascist dictators, and the tactics used to secure and maintain unfettered power. From that vantage, Orwell wrote, “In the time of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act.”

We support the revolution.

### Write in

If you would like to have something that you’ve written published in our pages, or would like to get involved as a member of our reporting staff, contact Executive Editor Joanne Zuhl at 503-228-5657, joanne@streetroots.org. We ask that all submissions include the author’s name and contact information, if available.



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