

# Measuring Media Bias

AN EXAMINATION OF THE REGISTER-GUARD'S SCHOOL COVERAGE

**O**ne way the news media demonstrate bias is by what they report and what they leave out.

Another is the negative or positive content of articles that do make it to print. A vital role of the media is to be a watchdog and a check on power, but not enough attention is given to monitoring the fairness of our local media's narrative.

I reviewed and indexed news articles about schools published in *The Register-Guard* from November 1, 2015, to October 31, 2016. I discovered a strong bias toward the South Eugene High School area. (No sports articles or community events announcements were included in my count.)

An unbiased media would give roughly equal coverage to the schools within its circulation area and would give equivalent time to both negative and positive stories. This, however, was not the case.

In the Springfield-Eugene metropolitan area, we have eight comprehensive public and private high schools, but 28 percent of the news articles in the *RG* center exclusively on South Eugene High School and its feeder schools. Specifically, 25 percent of the stories focused on South Eugene high, Roosevelt middle and Camas Ridge elementary schools, which together serve about 2,500 students — just 7 percent of the 36,500 students in our community.

Additionally, the stories about schools in South Eugene were predominantly positive. For every negative article printed about the South Eugene schools, 3.5 positive stories were published. Contrast that with Sheldon High School and its region, where for every positive story, 3.5 negative articles were published.

The ripples of this South Eugene-centric bias are felt throughout our community and may affect beliefs about the quality of education available at different schools. Because people in the community read a disproportionate number of stories that are overwhelmingly complimentary about South Eugene schools, they may be led to believe those schools are better. This perception can be detrimental to all schools and can foster inaccurate ideas about school opportunities and student body characteristics.

Trying to discern whether the media are initiating, perpetuating or merely reflecting bias in our community is challenging. Change will happen, though, only when media recognize their biases and work to correct for them. In this case, the *RG* may want to keep its own tally on its stories about schools, their students and teachers, and whether those stories convey a positive or negative image. We media consumers also have a responsibility to question whether the stories published represent an adequate sample of the whole story.

*Renée Buchanan (RBuchanan.research@gmail.com) is an independent researcher who lives in Eugene.*

**LETTERS**

time, they receive the benefits of a well paying job that includes the best medicine taxpayers can pay for, in the form of single payer healthcare! It's criminal.

*Robin Bloomgarden  
Eugene*

**ANOTHER VOTE FOR LEIGHTON**

Eugene's 4J District Board of Education has a vacant seat to fill in the May 16 election. We have the right person for the position: Dr. Mary Leighton.

This dynamic, involved woman has immersed herself in education for 45 years; she holds a doctorate in education and has done research in educational best practices. Mary has taught almost every grade level, from preschool to college, from a public charter school (director at Network Charter in Eugene for eight years) to a tribal school on a Navajo reservation.

Mary sees the financial challenges facing our Oregon schools, and she wants to collaborate with the board and the community to find creative ways to move forward. She currently teaches a UO course (sponsored by Lane Workforce Partnership, Lane Education Service District, Eugene Chamber of Commerce and City Club of Eugene) that partners local businesses and teachers with a goal of furthering career opportunities for high school students.

Mary is a "hands-on" person, with highly creative ideas — and the time and energy to carry them through. Remember Dr. Mary Leighton when you cast your vote for 4J School Board!

*Roz Stein  
Eugene*

**CLEAN ENERGY JOBS IN OREGON LEGISLATURE**

Oregon has an important opportunity to lead in the transition from a polluting economy using fossil fuels to a clean energy economy using renewable energy. By acting on this endeavor in a timely manner many new jobs will be created in the solar industry.

In Oregon, the quickest method to make this transition a reality is to put a price on climate pollution then invest the proceeds into clean energy jobs focused in economically distressed local communities. The proposed Clean Energy Jobs Bill under

consideration in the Oregon Legislature can accomplish this. It will create a cap for Oregon's largest polluters of greenhouse gases to meet the 2050 reduction targets.

The risks to delaying the action needed to curb greenhouse gases are well known. Lower snowpack results in less water in the summer months for agriculture and recreation. Heat waves, more intense forest fires, rising water temperatures are increasing. We need to act now.

On Thursday, March 23, there is a rally in Salem to support this bill. Please contact your state senators and ask them to pass the Clean Energy Jobs Bill. For more information contact james@olcv.org.

*Cary D. Thompson  
Eugene*

**CRITICAL THINKING**

As a fellow human being, I need the same requirements (i.e. food, shelter, clean water and safety). I am not left or right, as I make the effort to decipher through the press and media to make an intelligent, objective and non-partisan search and arrive at a well-researched conclusion.


Extreme posturing from either side just heightens the divide and politicized issues, which need to be dealt with for the welfare of all citizens. If you are on one side or the other, listening to partisan rhetoric and sound bites, then you are part of the problem.

We all have the responsibility to extrapolate the truth from various media and print outlets. Please don't label me as one way or another, because I make my own decisions based on multiple sources of media.

People who espouse partisan dialogue in media often have their own agenda, and it is every citizen's responsibility to look at all sides impartially and to arrive at their own opinion for the good of everybody — not just one side or the other.

*Jon Tipple  
Florence*

LETTERS POLICY: We welcome letters on all topics and will print as many as space allows, with priority given to timely local issues. Please limit length to 200 words and include your address and phone number for our files. Email to letters@eugeneweekly.com, fax to 484-4044 or mail to 1251 Lincoln, Eugene 97401.



**Eugene**  
**Mon., March 20<sup>th</sup> - 7 pm**  
Unitarian Universalist Church  
1685 W. 13th Ave.  
**1-877-MEDITATE**  
(Talk given by a local speaker)

*Sant Baljit Singh*

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