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OUR VIEW

Trump's attacks on the media risk freedom

“Words spoken by the president of the United States matter. Are you tonight recanting the oath you took on Jan. 20th to preserve, protect and defend the First Amendment?” U.S. Sen. Ben Sasse, R-Nebraska, asked this important question of President Donald Trump last week.

Trump said NBC should be punished for a story he didn't like by having its Federal Communications Commission license revoked. The president didn't understand the broadcaster doesn't rely on such a license. The threat is nevertheless deeply objectionable.

Trump's tweets and comments often are empty provocations, mainly intended to inflame his true believers. However, his many threats and insults thrown at working journalists and media organizations have real-world consequences. They must not go unchallenged by any American who genuinely cherishes our own democracy and cares about the pursuit of freedom in the rest of the world.

Trump's current target is NBC News. It is not the most revered member of the journalistic profession, being widely accused of wimpiness last year in covering the president's sexual assault admission to “Access Hollywood” host Billy Bush and this year's allegations of sexual predations by movie producer Harry Weinstein. The network's former news anchor Brian Williams was demoted for lying about his experiences covering the Iraq War.

The president's rant centers on an NBC report that Trump wanted a nearly tenfold increase in the U.S. nuclear arsenal. The network implied it was this proposal in a July 20 meeting that led Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to call Trump a moron. There is no indication the network's report was incorrect.

Adversarial relationship

Everyone understands why politicians get frustrated at the news media. It often is an adversarial relationship. Our traditions place the press in the role of independent watchdog over government. Because of this, some politicians regard the news media with the same loathing heaped on police internal-affairs divisions in stereotypical cop shows. Trump has taken this idea and ramped it up, trying to immunize himself against legitimate news by painting all journalists as liars and traitors — smart alecks out to get him.

The president's disdain for national media is ironic, considering how his celebrity status led to his election. Without the lavish coverage of him by television, magazines, radio and newspapers, he might still be nothing but a bankrupt casino owner. Most politicians implicitly realize they have some form of symbiotic relationship with the press. Hopefully, this usually is in the public interest by sharing information and building a sense of national unity, but other times it simply derives from a shared desire to ride the publicity train to fame and fortune.

Many politicians indulge in ritual complaints about victimization by the press. Trump far oversteps normal bounds. Calling major news outlets “the enemy of the American people” and saying journalists are “sick people ... trying to take away our history and our heritage” places honest news reporters at risk. There have been 20 arrests and 21 physical attacks on U.S. journalists this year, according to Columbia Journalism Review. Trump's bullying words also have dangerous consequences beyond our borders. Worldwide, there are 259 journalists currently imprisoned for doing their jobs, CJR reports. In Turkey, Mexico and elsewhere, strongmen attack the independent press. Reporters doing their jobs by shining a light into the dark recesses of criminal enterprises and political repression too often pay for their courage with their lives. By attacking America's press, the world's biggest strongman provides inspiration for all who aspire to dominate others.

'American identity'

In a column in CJR, Columbia University President Lee Bollinger notes the First Amendment guaranteeing freedom of speech and the press “is a core part of the American identity. As much as it is about ‘rights’ — the right of dissent, of sovereignty residing in the citizenry and not in the government, and so on — it is also about the character of the society. To listen to people speak of free speech and press is to hear about fortitude, bravery, magnanimity, self-doubt, and the capacity to reason and respond; to recognize the importance of compromise, and to learn to live with some degree of chaos, uncertainty, and discord; and to value creativity and change over always trying to preserve the status quo.”

As Sen. Sasse said, words matter — especially those of the U.S. president. Some are taking his words to heart. Freedom suffers as a result.

Trump swore to uphold the Constitution. He must endeavor to keep his word, even when it comes to freedom of the press.

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SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Learning from the 'McMinnville model'

One of the best writers I ever worked with was a 17-year-old intern. She was a Lake Oswego High School senior staying with her aunt over a summer in suburban New York City, where I edited a newspaper. Olivia wrote

more stories a week than full-time staff — and the material sparkled. No wonder she won a Northwest Excellence Award for high school journalism that year.

Employers from throughout the North Coast are hoping to find that sparkle in their interns, and companies including Martin North, Lum's Auto Center, Providence Seaside Hospital and Fort George Brewery came together in September at the South Campus of Clatsop Community College in Seaside to learn more.

“School district leaders were saying we want to engage with their industry partners, and our industry partners were saying they want to engage more with the school district,” Kevin Leahy of Clatsop Economic Development Resources, the host of the event, said. “It was a gap everybody voiced.”

Project goals

Myronda Schiding, a curriculum coordinator with the Northwest Regional Education Service District, said the district visited Yamhill County, where she began conversations about internship programs and grant opportunities.

The goal is to develop an internship program for the county, Schiding said.

“As we kept talking about it, we realized an internship project that is comprehensive and community-based like the McMinnville model would thrive here,” Schiding said.

She was referring to the McMinnville Works Internship Program, developed by Jody Christensen, executive director of McMinnville Economic Development Partnership.

Christensen was invited to Clatsop County by a coalition of CEDR, industry partners, local school districts and the Northwest Regional Education Service District to share her experience.

McMinnville Works

In McMinnville, businesses were shutting down production facilities, Christensen said.

“Businesses were flying out of our community,” Christensen said. “They were not filling positions for eight months. It was a problem, so we knew we had to have a grow-our-own work approach.”

One of the items industry partners wanted to explore was internships, she said. “They wanted us to take the mystery out of it, the complexity and simplify it. So they came on board and we developed the McMinnville Works Program.”

The program is in its sixth year, she said.

“Every community is looking at ways of attracting and retaining homegrown talent, and to take a grow-your-own workforce approach is the right thing to do,” Christensen said. “While industry wants longer connections with the school districts in the academic world, the academic world wants stronger connections



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

Jody Christensen, Myronda Schiding and Kevin Leahy at the internship workshop in Seaside.

with industry, so they are putting resources to making those things happen.”

Programs defined

Employers from Cannon Beach, Warrenton, Seaside and Astoria participated in hands-on exercises to define the intern's role.

Should internship opportunities be paid or unpaid? Part time or full time? What are the expectations of employers?

Well-delineated career path opportunities help interns learn “people and parts,” Christensen said.

Clatsop County has an extraordinary opportunity, Christensen added.

“You already have people who are engaged in the conversation, you have a comprehensive support system, you have an industry and employers who want this program to be successful, so that's all you need,” she said. “Today what we are doing is uncovering some of the elements to help make that happen.”

A pilot launch

Project descriptions, age ranges, paid or unpaid programs are yet to be determined in the crafting of the program.

“This is going to be Clatsop County's internship program,” Christensen said. “They can develop it to be all different shapes and sizes. Let's create the basic foundations and then build from there.”

Internships were originally designed for students 18 and older, Leahy said, but the program was expanded to include younger students.

How will the program's success be judged?

“This is considered a pilot launch,” Christensen said. “I wouldn't judge it on numbers, I would judge it on year two, who returns ... and then you can start having your benchmarks.”

The goal is to develop a framework for an ongoing internship program in the county, she said. The program could be tailored to individual communities.

Both students and employers need to be part of the conversation, Christensen said.

“They'll help develop the program where they can,” she said.

Internships could span businesses large and small.

“Every industry in your community, every sector should be able to

play in this space. They should be able to have an internship.”

What a company's internship program looks like in a year or five years could be very different, Christensen said.

Students graduating internship programs can share their experiences with future participants.

“We want multiple touch points with industry, with families, with community members with young children, so they know that this internship model is something that they can grow into,” Schiding said. “Part of this is marketing to local industry, to families, to the communities and growing that local workforce.”

Retaining talent

The September workshop was the first step in reaching out to employers, Leahy said.

An employer-led steering committee meets with CEDR's core planning group monthly, he said. The steering committee plans to attend an upcoming meeting of Clatsop County school superintendents to review funding needs for a countywide internship coordinator to move the program forward.

“We want to have more exposure,” Leahy said. “We want the kids to know about us.”

The program may offer opportunities who may not do the traditional four-year college route, he said, and it may draw graduates to jobs in Clatsop County.

“As a small rural county, we want to keep all of our talent,” Leahy said.

Port of Astoria Executive Director Jim Knight said he planned involvement in the program. He proposed tasks in the Port's environmental programs such as collecting samples or stormwater testing. Interns could perform administrative tasks, security or marketing roles. “It really runs the gamut,” Knight said.

As for my journalism intern from Lake Oswego, 10 years later, what is she doing now? Not in journalism, alas, but her career path hasn't been too shabby. She graduated from Stanford University and is now an analyst at a prestigious investment bank in New York City.

I like to think I've always been good at spotting new talent!

R.J. Marx is The Daily Astorian's South County reporter and editor of the Seaside Signal and Cannon Beach Gazette.