

OPINION



the Astorian

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GUEST COLUMN

Big Tech is steamrolling newspapers

Google and Facebook have enormous economic and political power in society — especially over the news industry. Many ask if they have played a role in the misinformation that erodes our free press and plagues our democracy.

Google and Facebook have a duopoly of the distribution of digital news content, which drives people to their platforms where they make money. The platforms hoard critical data and use clever tactics, like reframing stories in rich previews, to keep users on their sites — siphoning off the advertising revenue that small



BRETT WESNER

and local publishers need and weakening their ability to be rewarded for their own content.

Google and Facebook generated \$4 million in U.S. advertising revenue every 15 minutes during the first quarter of 2022. That amount could fund hundreds of local journalists in every state in the country.

It's no wonder that, despite record news consumption, local newspapers across the country have seen diminished revenues — leading many to lay off journalists or go out of business. Local newspapers simply can't compete with these national platforms, Google and Facebook. The imbalance of power between these platforms and local newspapers — let alone any single local paper — is so vast that newspapers cannot negotiate the exploitation of news. But antitrust laws shield Google and Facebook from the possibility of news publishers working together to demand better terms.

No company should have this much control over the news. Congress must take action to curb undue influence of Big Tech on the news media industry — and the Journalism Competition and Preservation Act aims to do just that.

The legislation is specifically designed to address Google's and Facebook's anticompetitive practices. The proposal would provide a



Jeff Chiu/AP Photo

Google and Facebook have a duopoly of the distribution of digital news content.

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE AISLE AGREE: WE NEED TO PASS THE LEGISLATION TO ENSURE THAT PUBLISHERS — ESPECIALLY SMALL AND LOCAL PUBLISHERS — ARE TREATED FAIRLY AND CAN SERVE THEIR COMMUNITIES.

temporary, limited antitrust safe harbor for small and local news publishers to collectively negotiate with Facebook and Google for fair compensation for the use of their content. The policy also incentivizes and rewards publishers who invest in their journalists and

newsroom personnel, awarding outlets with demonstrated investments in their staff a larger portion of the funds that result from the negotiations.

By addressing Google's and Facebook's monopoly power and ensuring more subscription and advertis-

ing dollars flow back to publishers, the legislation not only protects and promotes quality news, but also encourages competition.

In today's partisan political climate, it is rare for Democrats and Republicans to agree on anything — but the Journalism Competition and Preservation Act is one important exception. Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle agree: we need to pass the legislation to ensure that publishers — especially small and local publishers — are treated fairly and can serve their communities.

Brett Wesner is the chairman of the National Newspaper Association and president of Wesner Publications in Oklahoma.

GUEST COLUMN

Let's party like it's 1854

If what follows is going to make sense to you, it might help to know I've been a serious student of history since 1969 when a leprechaun-like dean put this 18-year-old country boy into a grad-level seminar on the first 26 years of American constitutional history.

From that day until this, history has been the lens through which I've tried to puzzle out what's going on in our world — and what we might do about it.

History also explains why, this year, I'm running for the Oregon Legislature without party affiliation. I've been around politics all my life — campaigning for Democrats and Republicans I respected. Until this year, I'd avoided running myself. But 2022 feels different somehow. It feels, if I may say so, historic.

I've long regarded America's two-party system as increasingly dysfunctional, but as a young man, I tried to find my place in it. My father, Frederick T. Gray, served 18 years as a Democratic Virginia state legislator, so I grew up in his party. But increasingly, the Democrats struck me as a ménagerie of tribes, held together by ruthless, machine tactics. The Republicans appeared to have room for a "progressive conservative" — a term coined by Benjamin Disraeli and personified by Teddy Roosevelt. In 1978, a young lawyer with ambitions of my own, I switched.

Republican Gov. John Dalton welcomed me — appointing me secretary of the Commonwealth. I volunteered for John Warner's U.S. Senate campaign, and got to escort his wife, Elizabeth Taylor, to several events. But within two years, Virginia's GOP was taken over by Reaganites — mostly segregationist former Democrats.

Reading the writing on the wall, I quit the party. A year later, having publicly opposed President Reagan's jailing of striking air traffic controllers, I lost my job.

Another year on, I found myself in a high-school classroom, sharing my love of history with a new generation.

Since then, I've occasionally tried the Democrats, working on behalf of candidates including Gary Hart, Howard Dean and Elizabeth Warren. But it was always awkward. Democrats lack a unifying

vision. The party's component tribes — each cherishing its particular sense of victimhood more than the general welfare — demand conflicting priorities. The result? A dozen "top priorities," which, of course, means no priorities — except winning the next election.

Meanwhile, over the decades, Republicans continued slouching toward Berchtesgaden. In my college days, conservatives had been distinguished for intellectualism — William F. Buckley, Russell Kirk, Peter Viereck, etc.

In time, despairing of winning majorities through ideas, Republicans embraced mere populism. The party of Lincoln degenerated into a party of bigotry, superstition, greed and adolescent narcissism. In time, this populism turned dangerous. Today, few Republicans can be trusted with the machinery of democracy.

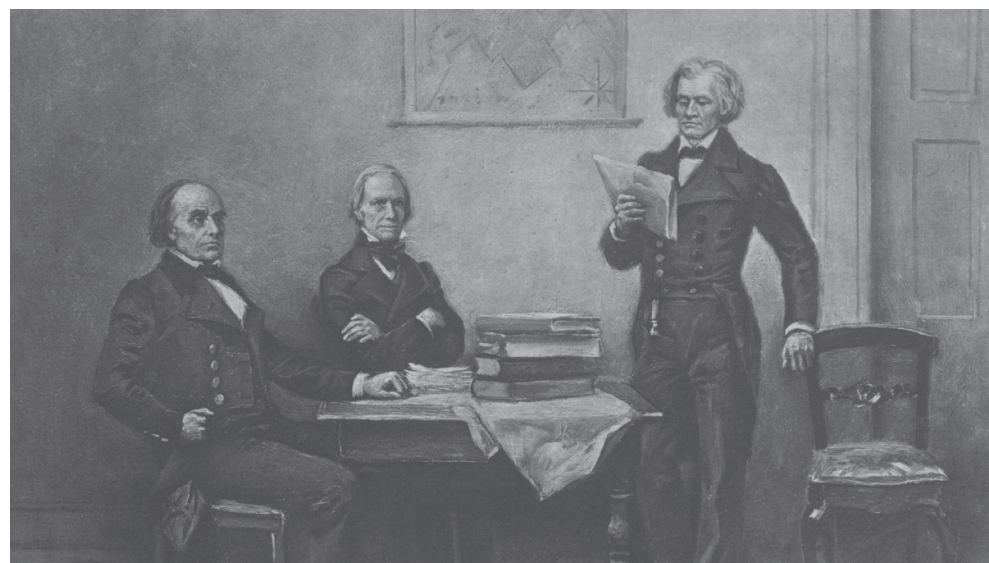
And the two-party system?

In my youth, Democrats and Republicans competed to offer alternative — but essentially positive — visions for the future. Now, they compete to be merely the lesser of two evils. Such a debased competition offers Americans neither vision, ideas, nor hope.

Wherever life took me, I pondered the degeneration of the partisan duopoly. Over time, one volume of history demanded repeated study: David M. Potter's 1976 Pulitzer Prize-winner, "The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861." In his study of the years leading to the Civil War, Potter tells the story of ordinary politicians practicing everyday politics with only the vaguest



'RICK GRAY



Kean Collection/Getty Images

The Whig Party splintered in 1854 over slavery.

notion of the cataclysm toward which their actions tended.

Increasingly, this book struck me as a metaphor for our times.

I found myself focusing on Chapter 10, which introduces the only truly successful third party in American history: the original Republican Party. And I began to find hope.

By 1854, America's two-party system had grown dysfunctional. The nation was bitterly divided, primarily over one compelling moral issue, which neither party had the courage to address. Slavery.

Directly related to this moral issue was the practical need for economic transformation: from producing raw materials for European markets to industrializing here, feeding new factory towns from small farms and ranches in the West, with everything connected by rail.

One event finally disrupted two-party

paralysis. In 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska Act opened all Western territories to slavery. Outraged anti-slavery politicians — Whigs and Democrats — quit their respective parties, embraced former enemies and founded a new party.

Within seven years, this new third party had put Abraham Lincoln in the White House and captured both Houses of Congress. Once in power, Republicans passed the Homestead Act, began building transcontinental railroads, and — aided by wartime demand and federally-chartered banks — began transforming America into the world's greatest economy.

They also won a war and ended slavery.

Yet strangely, American students are routinely assured that third parties "cannot succeed" here.

History tells us otherwise. A third party can succeed, if only in very specific circumstances. Are these circumstances present today? Consider:

- A broken two-party system? Check.
- An urgent moral imperative? Saving our planet for future generations.
- A related need to transform our economy? Sustainability.

To this student of history, we have arrived, again, at 1854.

This is why, at 71, I've decided to run for office — independent of both parties. To see if my reading of history makes sense to anyone else. But more importantly, for the sake of our future.

Frederick "Rick" Gray Jr. lives in Cannon Beach and is running as a nonaffiliated candidate for state House District 32.

LETTERS WELCOME

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