

News

Capitol Hill Lawmakers Push Bill That Hurts Local and Black-owned Newspapers

By Stacy M. Brown, NNPA Newswire

On the surface, the Journalism Competition and Preservation Act sounds like a win for news organizations that remain committed to providing vital information for their communities.

It also sounds suitable for the survival of important local news.

However, like many pieces of legislation that float around Capitol Hill, flaws abound.

Intended to support local journalism, the bill introduced by Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) would create a link tax on social media platforms.

The bill suggests lawmakers would carve out an exception in the federal antitrust law and allow U.S. publishers to

negotiate payment from websites that profit from aggregating lists of links on the search and social media platforms where users can click on and visit a news site.

In Klobuchar and her colleagues' attempt to save local news from tech behemoths like Google, Facebook, and Twitter, critics contend that the legislation would be the final nail in the coffin of small and minority-owned newspapers and media companies.

The National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), the trade organization representing more than 230 African American-owned newspapers and media companies, count among those objecting to the measure.

For further clarity, the NNPA represents the in-

terest of the Black Press of America, which for 195 years, has published through slavery, Jim Crow, Civil Rights, and the modern-day era of Fake News.

"The JCPA would require tech platforms to carry and pay any eligible news publisher for 'access' to content. While this may, again, seem well-intentioned at first look, upon deeper inspection, the law defines 'access' so broadly it will require payment for simply crawling a website or sharing a link," NNPA President and CEO Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. wrote in an editorial.

"Similarly, while a number of conglomerates are scoped into the bill, true independent or small newspapers are explicitly excluded from the legislation because



the bill says that an eligible publisher must earn more than \$100,000 per year," Chavis asserted.

The primary problem? "The bill itself wouldn't address the underlying problems that have news organizations struggling economically," Jeremy Littau of Future Tense wrote.

Littau further noted the bill's structural problem.

"The internet is built in ways that favor free link exchange, and news organizations risk not being missed if they are booted from platforms whose business ironically is built to deliver them traffic," he wrote.

"There's no oversight or accountability for whatever money is paid out to know whether the JCPA actually works as intended."

Littau continued: "Finally, there's the innovation problem related to who is excluded. The JCPA would subsidize dying brands and, likely to avoid weighing in on the tiresome debate over whether bloggers are journalists, creates the \$100,000 threshold that leaves behind some of our most promising news startups. The future of news can't be about propping up struggling legacy players and

punishing innovators."

Chavis also related that many African American and other BIPOC news outlets are independently owned.

Furthermore, these news outlets have developed and grown their audiences because mainstream media publications excluded the

vis insisted.

"Similarly, recent amendments to the bill requiring non-discrimination would require platforms to carry and pay for hate speech and objectionable content that could harm BIPOC communities."

He said if passed, the JCPA would boost misinformation and extremist content. News publications from either side of the aisle that support extremist views will receive money, and tech platforms will be required to carry them on their services.

"This will make it even harder for platforms to moderate harmful and false content. We know that communities like ours will suffer most," Chavis concluded.

Sen. Klobuchar did not respond to a request for comment from the Black Press.

Several lawmakers in both chambers, including Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.), Rep. Al Green

See **NEWSPAPERS** page 7

“The Black Press built our own news outlets to support our own voices

perspectives of minority voices.

"The Black Press built our own news outlets to support our own voices. As a result, this legislation would only further reinforce harmful racial exclusion trends rather than actually help smaller local publications like those in the NNPA," Cha-


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