

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OTHER VIEWS

Power of the press

The power of the press rests in the ability of journalists to hold government accountable, to mobilize public opinion on matters that are important to individuals, communities or the nation, and to provide necessary information of value.

Notice in those words not a mention of celebrity content, mobile devices nor “aspirational” reportage that feels good without doing any good.

But also notice in those words the key to the future for newsrooms across the nation: a visible role in the daily life of the nation rooted in real benefit and sustained credibility.

Newsprint may not be the medium-of-choice today for many readers, and perhaps certainly not the one for the desired next generation of readers. But the news organizations behind what certainly will be a blend of printed and electronic pages must be again the mediums-of-choice for that group, whether they be thought-leaders in society, officeholders in government or voters.

The nation — our audience — needs facts, presented clearly, accurately and completely. For those who are held rapt by the comings and goings of the Kardashians and turn away from discussion of policy in the more substantive debate: Well, perhaps it’s time to say “goodbye” and leave them to vacuous talking heads, unreal “reality” shows and the assortment of cable TV geek-fests that offer a chance to feel superior just by sitting on a sofa.

“Targeted circulation” indeed. Let’s leave behind the prideful ignorant who proclaim little faith and demonstrate even less actual consumption of news, and target those readers and users who want news and data and informed decisions — and who will pay a reasonable fee to get it.

OK, not as easy to gather in and report out as feature items and single-interview chats. It means bucking the system to place journalists in seats where daily decisions are made and social issues discussed — from city hall to church pews. It means bringing the news of the day in new ways, but with the same old standards that separated opinion from fact, news pages from editorials and commentary from reporting.

The Newseum Institute’s State of the First Amendment



national survey, published on July 4, 2016, showed that 70 percent of respondents disagreed with the statement that “overall, the news media tries to report the news without bias.”

To be sure, the charge of bias has been leveled at journalists since the nation began — and was, in fact, welcomed by many in the first “journals of opinion” and later by media moguls making no pretense at publishing anything but “news” filtered through their own views.

But over time, and by dint of the hard work and credible reporting by tens of thousands of journalists — in

newspapers, and later in radio, television and now online — readers, listeners, viewers and users gave their loyalty to news operations that brought them what they needed.

As emotional as one can be when waxing about ink-on-newsprint, it was the information that was printed with that ink, on those pages, that made newspapers strong and powerful — and that information was the stuff, not the fluff — of life.

Of course there is room for entertaining, uplifting stories and reports on that part of the day that makes us chuckle, smile or simply shake a head. But editorial decisions ought not to start and end there. “Click-bait” ought not to squeeze out real debate. “Metrics” ought not to rule over meaning. And the challenge in thorough reporting on the county’s budget next year ought to mean finding a new way — perhaps through the new studies of gaming technology as applied to news reporting — of telling a complex story. Decades ago, *USA TODAY* showed us how color weather maps and national sports rankings could be fun while still bringing needed information to commuters, gardeners and golfers — and while also reporting on AIDS, national security issues and unsafe military vehicles.

Consider that most news today still originates with mainstream media — and that the value for those aggregators was simply in finding a new way to package and deliver the content. A simple text-and-photo site called Craigslist wreaked havoc on the financial underpinnings of a massive industry just by finding an easier way to post and peruse the same information. Cannot we collectively continue to find such innovation within newsrooms as well?

Journalists have learned many hard lessons over the last two decades: Nobody really loved us because of our nameplates, innovation was not just a good idea but a daily consideration on survival, and we no longer are the gatekeepers anymore between news makers and news consumers.

But in those tough, even brutal, decades, we’ve also discovered how to make our pages come alive — literally, via the web — and found new ways to know about and be in contact with those interested in news and information. To the old axiom about being “Clear, concise and accurate” those who have survived have added “responsive.”

The power of the press was, is now, and will be in the future, bringing consumers the news they need — and having the fortitude to seek and report the news they don’t even yet know they need, but will.

Ignorance and apathy is the challenge. Credibility and necessity are the means to overcome those challenges.

■
Gene Policinski is a founding editor of USA TODAY, is chief operating officer of the Freedom Forum Institute and of the Institute’s First Amendment Center.

OTHER VIEWS

What should happen after Rosenstein’s bugging talk

Not long after a 2017 meeting in which Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein reportedly discussed wearing a wire to secretly record conversations with President Trump, two top officials in the meeting, FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe and bureau lawyer Lisa Page, went to the office of a third FBI official, general counsel James Baker.

They told Baker what Rosenstein said, according to Baker’s recent testimony to House investigators. And Baker took the news very seriously.

After Rosenstein’s comments were reported in *The New York Times* last month, Rosenstein sent out word through intermediaries that he hadn’t really meant it, that he was speaking sarcastically. But that is not how top FBI officials took it at the time.

“The thing that struck me the most was the serious look on Baker’s face when he was describing it,” one source close to the investigation said of Baker’s House interview. “He was conveying that they (McCabe and Page) took it seriously, and because they took it seriously, he took it seriously.”

“McCabe, Page and Baker were talking about (secretly recording the president) as a real thing, and discussing it as a serious



BYRON YORK
Comment

issue,” said another source close to the investigation.

The *Times* reported that in a meeting held in the spring of 2017, amid the uproar over Trump’s firing of FBI Director James Comey, Rosenstein “raised the idea of wearing a recording device, or ‘wire,’ as he put it, to secretly tape the president when he visited the White House.”

According to the *Times*, “One participant asked whether Mr.

Rosenstein was serious, and he replied animatedly that he was.”

The *Times* said Rosenstein also suggested that in addition to him recording the president, other officials could, too. The paper said Rosenstein noted that White House officials did not make him give up his cellphone when visiting, “implying it would be easy to secretly record Mr. Trump.”

There has been some speculation among Hill Republicans that McCabe was behind the story, that he was trying to set Rosenstein up for a fall. Investigators wondered whether McCabe and Page were telling Baker the truth. But at the very least, Baker’s interview shows that Rosenstein’s suggestion was taken seriously.

The *Times* also reported that Rosenstein “discussed recruiting Cabinet members to

invoke the 25th Amendment to remove Mr. Trump from office for being unfit.” One of the sources familiar with the investigation said that Baker, in his House interview, “did indicate that there was strong belief that Rosenstein was coordinating with two people within the administration who were contemplating invoking the 25th.”

The Rosenstein revelations intensified a long-running debate over the possibility that Trump might fire the deputy attorney general. The debate focused not so much on what should or should not happen to Rosenstein but on what effect a firing would have on the work of Trump-Russia special counsel Robert Mueller. With Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused from the Russia investigation, Rosenstein oversees Mueller’s office.

Democrats, and some Republicans, warned Trump against firing Rosenstein. “This story must not be used as a pretext for the corrupt purpose of firing Deputy Attorney General Rosenstein in order to install an official who will allow the president to interfere with the special counsel’s investigation,” said Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer shortly after the *Times* story appeared.

No firing seems imminent. Rosenstein flew with President Trump on Air Force One to Florida Monday. The two men held a 45-minute discussion. After the trip,

Trump was asked whether he plans to fire Rosenstein. “No, I don’t,” the president answered.

Trump’s handling of Rosenstein has baffled some Republicans. Here is a top administration official who was at the very least musing about the possibility of bugging the president and attempting a never-used strategy to remove him from office. Some might assume that Trump would fire such an official, effective immediately, and have him escorted from the building.

But there are reasons Trump has not acted, starting with next month’s elections. “One, it’s strategic timing of the midterms,” said a third source close to the investigation. “And two, there are people in the administration who are telling the president that Rosenstein is a good guy and part of the team. These are people that Trump talks to regularly.”

As for Baker, he left the FBI amid controversy in May. And, of course, McCabe and Page left the bureau amid controversy, too. They are just now beginning to tell their stories to Congress. And in the case of Rosenstein and the wearing-a-wire discussion, much more remains to be learned.

■
Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner.



Kavanaugh appointment a step against abortion

For my friends who are up in arms about Kavanaugh you might consider some dissonant facts. For instance, in our rural area, a strong majority of women supported the nomination with a big reason in mind: he opposes killing babies. As I do.

That’s not to say I was giddy but ... these women are not benighted hicks. Not at all; most are informed, educated and sharp as tacks. Formidable women with talents and wisdom.

And from reputable polls I’ve read about the

state at large, along with the nation as a whole, a strong majority of women back this sentiment: that killing babies is wrong. And killing babies is a huge, corporatized enterprise in this country — killing the voiceless for greed.

Thus it may be that this confirmation is a case of the chickens coming home to roost. In a compassionate heart this would be an occasion for respectful dialogue and efforts to understand each other rather than an occasion to polarize and act righteous. We might otherwise help continue the slide into the heartless dark.

Keith Gallagher
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