

Siuslaw News
P.O. Box 10
Florence, OR 97439

Opinion

The First Amendment
Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

"I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." —Thomas Jefferson (1800)



Never in a hurry to 'be first' with bad information

Before becoming a journalist some 21 years ago, I was a chef for 10 years working in Houston, Atlanta and eventually Portland. I had a simple mantra I repeated in every restaurant, from line cook to server:

Never be in a hurry to serve bad food.

As a journalist and editor, it's a mantra that I have applied to reporting the news, especially when it involves sensitive, controversial or investigative stories within our community.

In an age where media outlets are constantly competing to "be first" to break news, there is a pattern of reporting that has evolved making incomplete, unverified or single-sourced reporting acceptable in order to "be first."

Some of this comes from the pressure within the media industry itself in an era of instant information and access; some of it comes from pressure outside the industry due to social media's ability to spread speculation, rumor and assumption like

wildfire through community circles.

Never be in a hurry to serve bad food — or in the case of good journalism, inaccurate or incomplete information.

In a front-page story

were frustrated with the lack of coverage in *The Sentinel* once larger news outlets such as *KEZI* and *The Register-Guard* began reporting information provided by anonymous sources.

volving a student on the "spirit bus" who made a statement online about possible self-harm and potentially harming others during the return trip from last week's JV football game at La Pine.

According to Siuslaw School Superintendent Andy Grzeskowiak, law enforcement was contacted and made a threat assessment, as is the district's policy.

As of press time, the investigation had not yet been completed.

In the meantime, there has been a lot of speculation about the incident — from how the school handled it to rumors that players were told not to talk about it — that have been spreading on social media and conveyed through some emails sent to our newsroom.

Once again, we are in no hurry to "be first" in making matters worse for our community or those within it by fueling rumor or speculation with irresponsible reporting.

We hope you understand that our reporting on this incident won't be about trying to "be first," but rather to be first in providing you with the information that is factual and complete.

We took some lumps on social media but were determined to approach our gathering of information — and eventual reporting — with objectivity and thoroughness so that the community had a solid and accurate foundation of information moving forward rather than half-truths and speculation.

In addition to wanting to provide accurate and credible reporting, journalists at smaller community newspapers also understand how their reporting can have real-life consequences — good or bad — for members of their community, whether it be the local government, schools, business owners, the police department, victims or the accused.

Here in Florence, there is currently an investigation by the school district into an incident in-

From the Editor's Desk *Ned Hickson*

that was published this past Wednesday in the *Cottage Grove Sentinel*, where I am also editor, we reported on the terrible broomstick hazing incident that occurred in a Cottage Grove High School locker room.

Sentinel reporters had been working on the story since late September, talking with people on and off the record; contacting local police as well as the district attorney's office; working to obtain official documentation, reports and verification; and cross referencing our information to insure that we could offer a comprehensive report that had been vetted through multiple sources.

We were in no hurry to "be first" in offering incomplete or unverified information to the community.

Understandably, some community members

LETTER

DOES IT REALLY HAVE TO BE ALL OR NOTHING?

It saddens me that Patricia Burke chose to be "offended" by my suggestion ("Focus On Deeds Rather Than Words," Oct. 26) that we focus on local efforts to preserve our environment, especially when she ended up listing pretty much the same local initiatives I suggested in my letter.

The main issue we seem to differ on is that I think it is counter-productive to shame working men and women who have no choice but to drive to and from work to feed their families. I believe such demands for ideolog-

ical purity only fuels further polarization of our society, as if the only choices were either absolute adherence to some sect-like "climate wokeness" or burning old tires in the backyard just for the heck of it.

We don't live in a perfect world, and thus we have to balance utopian goals against reality on the ground. Most people must use fossil fuels because modern life demands it, and until the next big technical breakthrough comes around that's not likely to change.

In the meantime, we can all lead by example and do the kind of small efforts I outlined with-

out provoking conflict with those who do not yet share our concern for the environment.

But apparently, being in 95 percent agreement isn't enough anymore. Has it really come to this? Must it really be all or nothing, with zero tolerance for the slightest heresy to the Official Gospel of Climate Change?

I wonder though: How can anyone possibly hope to bridge the gap and reach the hearts and minds of "the other side" if a minor disagreement with someone already sharing all the same basic concerns manages to offend you?

—Matt Danielsson
Florence

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Siuslaw News welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Letters that are anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or documented will not be published.

Letters containing poetry or from outside the Siuslaw News readership area will only be published at the discretion of the editor.

POLITICAL/ELECTION LETTERS:

Election-related letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large.

Letters must 1) Not be a part of letter-writing campaigns on behalf of (or by) candidates; 2) Ensure any information about a candidate is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay; and 3) Explain the reasons to support candidates based on personal experience and perspective rather than partisanship and campaign-style rhetoric.

Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes; this constitutes paid political advertising.

As with all letters and advertising content, the newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher, general manager and editor, reserves the right to reject any letter that doesn't follow the above criteria.

Email letters to:
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