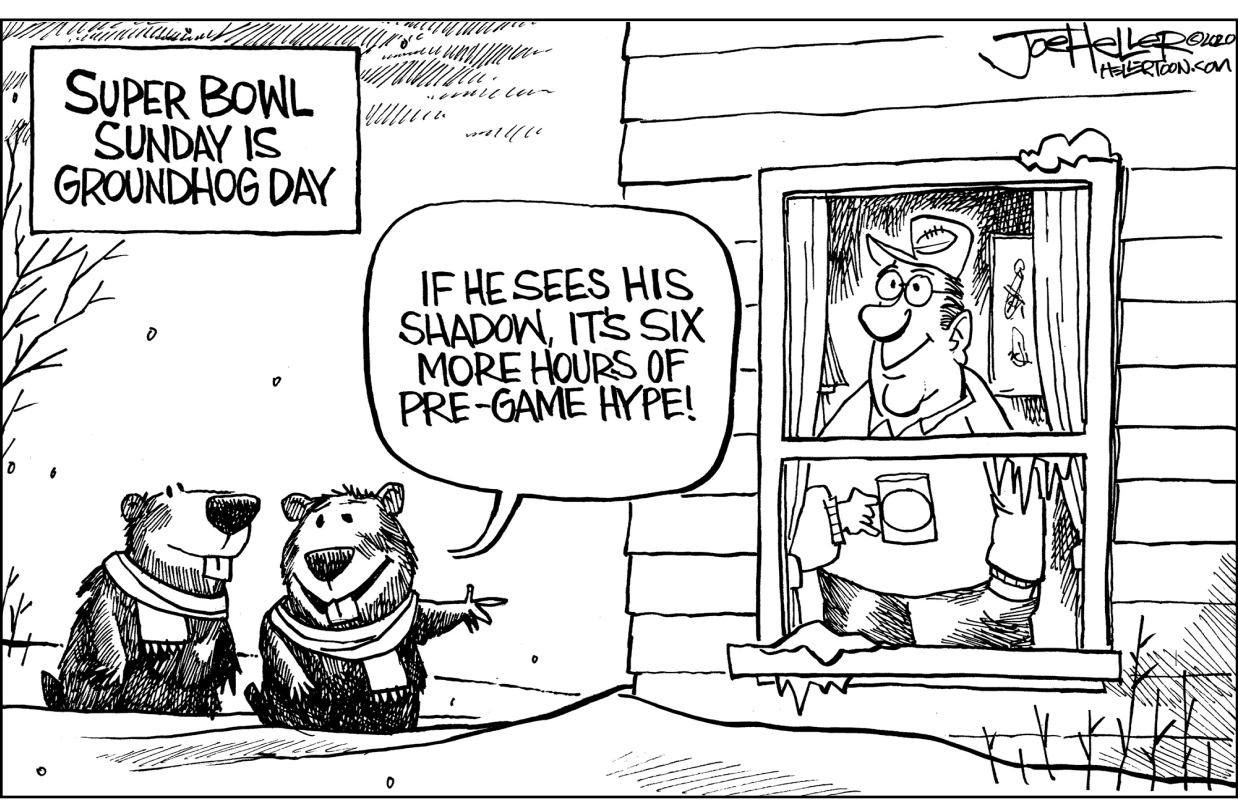


**Cottage Grove Sentinel**  
 116 N. Sixth St.  
 Cottage Grove, Ore. 97424

# 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)*



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### Letters to the Editor Policy

The Sentinel 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anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or without documentation will not be published.

Letters containing poetry or from outside The Sentinel 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.

**Send letters to:**  
 nhickson@cgsentinel.com



## Meeting the challenges faced by community papers

newspapers accounted for roughly 25 percent of the local media outlets in the sample, they accounted for nearly 60 percent of the original news stories collected in the 100-city sample.

In fact, local newspapers produced more of the reporting in their communities than television, radio and online-only outlets combined.

When the results were compared, online-only news sources accounted for just 10 percent of original news content within their communities.

Media and Journalism. This has led to the rise of "ghost papers," which are papers produced outside of their communities and patched together with canned news. In many cases, communities across the country have been left without any local paper at all.

Number 2 in this unfortunate trifecta:

### The two-edged sword of social media.

On the plus side, social media has allowed smaller newspapers like this one to be more relevant and time-

of journalism at the national level has trickled down to even small community newspapers as political divisiveness on both sides attempt to pressure local news to reflect a specific narrative.

So, how has The Sentinel and other community newspapers survived? And what does the future hold for community journalism?

Since becoming managing editor at The Sentinel a little over two years ago, my goal has been — and continues to be — a simple one:

To provide the community with the sound of its own voice.

Arthur Miller once wrote that "A good newspaper is a nation talking to itself." I feel the same applies to a good community newspaper. It should be made up of reporting that reflects facts and perspectives from all sides of the conversation, along with the opportunity for individuals to express their viewpoints in letters and editorials through the Opinion page.

We need to celebrate our achievements as a community as well as recognize our failures by being both chroniclers and watchdogs.

The fact that we have received complaints from both republicans and democrats, liberals and conservatives for leaning "too far left" or "too far right" (sometimes on the same day) tells me we are somewhere in the middle — which is where we should be to remain objective.

I think that is a big part of why we have survived 131 years and why, over the last few years, we've thrived and grown despite the challenges.

As for the future, though the number of legacy newspapers has declined, those like The Sentinel, Siuslaw News and our neighbors at The Chronicle remain because they have yet to be displaced as a vital source of local journalism.

And if the Harvard University study I mentioned earlier is any indication, the emergence of online-only and "ghost newspapers" as comparable sources of local journalism still appears to be a very long way off.

### From the Managing Editor's Desk

Ned Hickson

Guess where 60 percent of the remaining content came from?

That's right: Community newspaper sources.

Over the course of the last 10 years, the newspaper industry was hit by a trifecta of challenges.

#### Rising cost of newsprint.

A months-long spike in the price of paper, driven by federal tariffs on Canadian suppliers, slammed newspapers and drove the costs of news print into double-digit increases beginning in 2017 and lasting through late 2018.

Newsprint is typically a publication's second-biggest operating expense after labor. The result was a wholesale cutting of journalists at newspapers across the country.

According to News Media Alliance, nearly half of the 272 newspaper publishers surveyed said they had laid off news staff as a direct result of newsprint price increases.

In addition, some 71 percent said they had also cut back the number of pages they published each day.

Publishers reported an average annual newsprint cost increase of \$176,818

Over the past 15 years, more than one-in-five newspapers in the U.S. has closed, with half of those closures occurring in the last four years. And for the papers that remained open, the number of journalists working for them has been cut in half, according to research by the University of North Carolina's School of

ly by providing us a way to share important information and news stories on a daily basis by posting them online and sharing them to our social media sites.

The downside is that social media has ushered in an age of unverified information or opinion presented as fact. The result has been a general mistrust of media as a whole when it doesn't conform to a specific narrative.

I can tell you that nearly a quarter of our time is spent investigating or dispelling rumors that begin on social media.

While social media has provided small newspapers with an impactful way of getting information out to the communities they serve, it has also made our job as journalists harder by introducing another layer of information that needs to be clarified and — more often than not — dispelled through additional resources and investigation.

The third challenge journalists face:

#### The politicalization of news and blurring of opinion with fact.

This actually began more than a decade ago with the advent of cable news and the 24-hour news cycle, which has eagerly been filled with news "analysis" and opinion programming.

The result has been the tribalization of information as people actively seek — or are tagged with — the news that best supports a specific narrative or political leaning. Coupled with social media, the distrust

## HOW TO CONTACT YOUR REPS

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