Opinion

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OUR VIEW

We can't afford to shortchange students

As legislators across the nation grapple with revenue shortfalls caused by the shutdown and curtailment of businesses in their states, we would like to issue a plea.

Please, do not balance state budgets on the back of education. Other programs can be trimmed or cut entirely and wouldn't be missed, but education is the key to our future.

A strong state economy is the product of a strong K-12, community college, technical school and university system.

While legislators may shrug and say they can't afford to fully fund education, we will argue that they can't afford not to.

During this pandemic, governors and other political leaders have urged people to stay home and to shut down the businesses that pay local, state and federal taxes. What they apparently forgot or ignored was the damage their actions would inflict on their states.

Nationwide, 33 million people were thrown out of work — more than half of the adult population. That is temporary. The number of unemployed will shrink as COVID-19 continues to subside.

Congress has also promised to help the states get back on more solid fiscal footing.

In the meantime, we urge all of our elected representatives not to do permanent damage by shortchanging education to solve a temporary problem.

Whether kindergarten or graduate-level research, education is an economic driver. Education produces entrepreneurs, business owners, farmers, ranchers ... the list goes on.

And it produces good citizens, who know more than the bare minimum about physics, chemistry, biology, history, language and the many facets of our great civilization.

If we relegate the current generation to online classes and rob them of the richness of a full slate of in-person classes, our economy will suffer. Some students may well thrive with some online classes, but others will tune out and eventually drop out.

Some classes may lend themselves to an online format. Others, not so much. Try learning to weld, raise livestock or repair a tractor online. Try to discuss the mysteries of ancient worlds or the inner workings of DNA on Zoom.

Good luck.

We appreciate that online classes have offered a last-minute substitute for real school and college work.

But now that many parts of the nation have curbed the spread of COVID, the time has come to consider allowing students to return — and to make sure the high schools, community colleges and universities are adequately funded to carry out the classwork and research that are essential to a 21st century economy.

All students in all schools deserve the best possible education, not just for their sake but for the sake of the economy. And it will require more than Zoom.

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Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.
- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.

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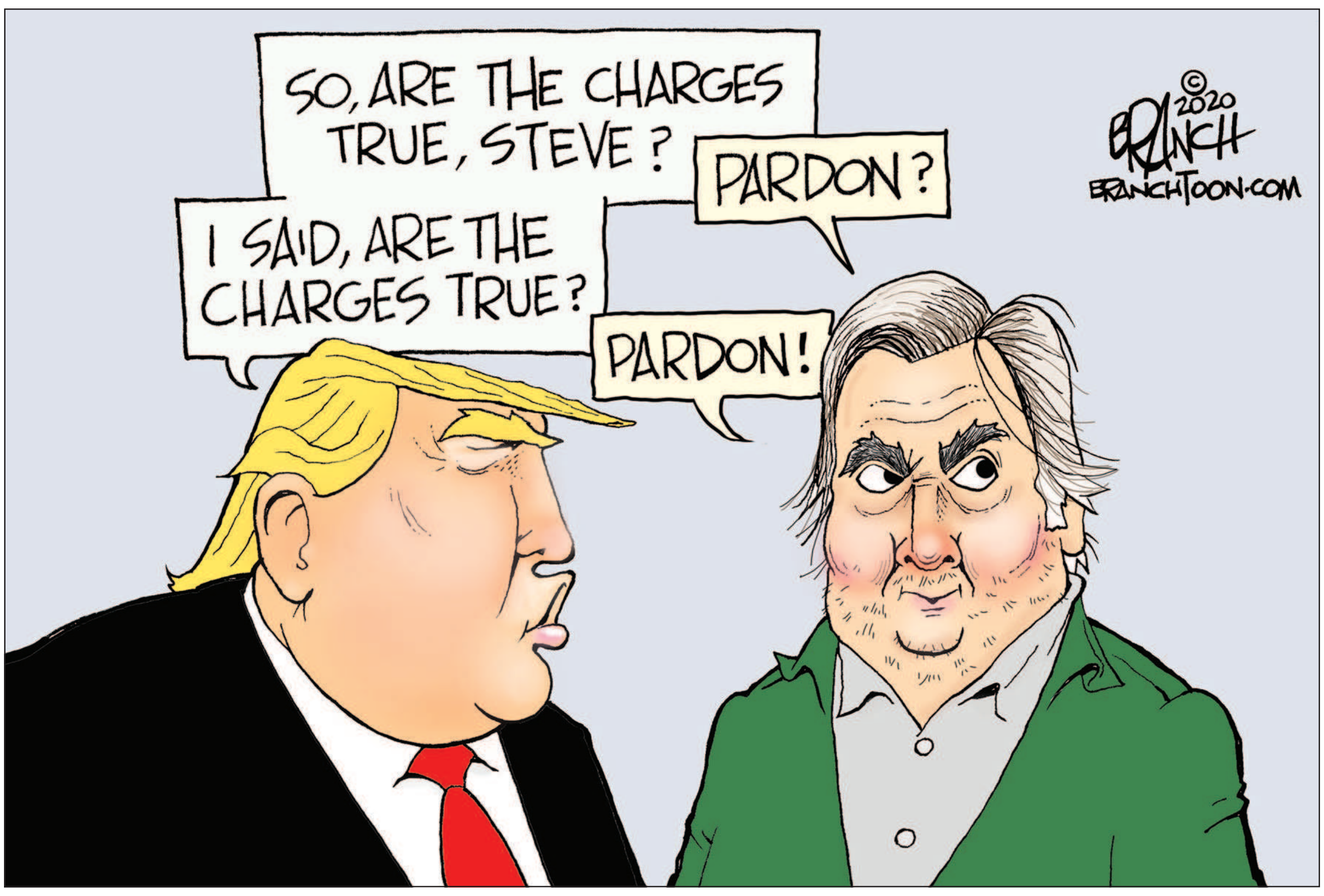

Why the news business needs an anti-trust safe harbor

DAVID CHAVERN

News consumption is growing exponentially, but for the past decade, the revenue to news publishers has been on a decline. This is, in large part, because of the unbalanced relationship between news publishers and tech platforms. But that relationship could be changing thanks to the bipartisan introduction of the "Journalism Competition and Preservation Act" (JCPA). H.R. 2054 was introduced by House Antitrust Subcommittee Chairman David Cicilline (D-RI) and former House Judiciary Committee Ranking Member Doug Collins (R-Ga). A bipartisan companion bill, S. 1700, was also introduced by Sen. John Neely Kennedy (R-La.), member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), ranking member of the Senate Antitrust Subcommittee.

The bill, which would provide news publishers a safe harbor in which to collectively negotiate with platforms like Google and Facebook, could help news producers receive the fair distribution and monetization terms we've long been fighting to get from the duopoly.

Because of their market dominance — and access to billions of users — the major tech platforms set the rules for news publishers and determine how journalism is displayed, prioritized and monetized. They also capture the vast majority of all digital advertising dollars because of their unique ability to collect consumer data across the web.

All of this has degraded the relationship between news readers and publishers and rewarded low quality "click-bait" over quality information from real journalists. It has also greatly reduced the financial ability of publishers to invest in newsrooms at a time when our society most needs great, substantive reporting.

It is simply not possible for any individual news publisher to change the basic terms offered by the online behemoths. They are simply much too big and much too influential.

However, there is power in numbers, which is what we need in order to have a fighting chance. The antitrust safe harbor bill would provide a four-year window for news publishers to collectively negotiate for fair terms that would flow earned subscription and advertising dollars back to the publishers, while protecting and preserving Americans' right to access quality news. Parameters included in the bill ensure that these negotiations would strictly benefit Americans and news publishers at-large, not just one or a few publishers.

The JCPA has until the end of the year to pass the 116th Congress, and we need our Representatives to act now to support journalism's future.

If passed, this bill would allow our industry to more fully control our product by allowing market forces, not two companies, to determine how and for what price our content is offered. It would allow everyone from small local publications to major online publishers the opportunity to receive a return on their investment and therefore sustain quality journalism, which is necessary for an informed democracy and civic society.

David Chavern is the president and CEO of the News Media Alliance.

OTHER VIEWS

Getting flu vaccine this year can help U.S. avoid a 'twindemic'

Editorial from The Minneapolis Star-Tribune:

The COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S. fortunately had minimal overlap with the influenza season's typical December-February peak. But that grace period is coming to a close as the new coronavirus remains uncontrolled through much of the country and the yearly flu season approaches again.

Thankfully, there's an inexpensive, widely available remedy to avoid what experts have dubbed a "twindemic," meaning simultaneous outbreaks of these two dangerous respiratory viruses. That solution is something we should all be getting this fall anyway — the annual flu shot.

It's always important to be immunized against a seasonal health threat that kills between 12,000 and 61,000 Americans annually. But the ongoing COVID crisis lends additional urgency. The flu alone can strain health care capacity during a normal year. Fewer people getting seriously ill from it would help conserve needed hospital capacity for COVID cases.

"Without a doubt if there ever was a year to get your flu shot, it's this year," said Patsy Stinchfield, a pediatric infectious-disease nurse practitioner with the Children's Minnesota health care system.

Flu vaccine shipments are already underway to health care providers. There should be plenty of vaccine here and elsewhere. "Vaccine manufacturers have projected that they will supply between 194 million and 198 million doses of influenza vaccine for the 2020-2021 season. This is a 20 million dose increase compared to the record 175 million doses distributed for the 2019-2020 flu season," according to a recent statement from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The shot is generally recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older, with autumn continuing to be the optimal time frame. But reports indicating frustrating reluctance to take advantage of a COVID vaccine, should one become available, also raise concerns about flu shots. Ludicrous conspiracy theories about COVID and the scientists battling it abound on social media. The disinformation could have a spillover effect of broader distrust.

The shift to home offices also raises concerns. Many people get the yearly immunization at their workplace. This year, fewer will have that opportunity.

The Minnesota Health Department is commendably strengthening its flu shot awareness campaign with the help of CDC funding. The MDH website also lists vaccination clinics where qualifying uninsured or underinsured adults can get free shots. In addition, the Minnesota Vaccines for Children Program offers free or low-cost shots for those eligible under the age of 18.

But state health officials can't, and shouldn't have to, power this campaign on their own. Collaboration from employers, health care providers and insurers is needed to boost awareness and find new, creative ways to make getting the shot easy and convenient. For example, the Star Tribune Editorial Board would like to see more drive-thru clinics while weather permits. And are there mobile options that could reach far-flung workers and their families?

The shot is safe and usually covered without out-of-pocket expenses by insurance. Employers and insurers need to drive that message home and encourage parents to ensure that their children are vaccinated, too. Another critical reminder: Kids under 8 getting the flu immunization for the first-time or who have had only one dose previously need a second dose during the same flu season for full protection.

Research indicates that the flu vaccine can reduce children's risk of being hospitalized for complications from the virus by a stunning 74%. Stinchfield, from Children's Minnesota, advises parents to include flu preparations for their little ones as part of their Halloween activities.

"If you're shopping for or making kids' costumes or getting candy," Stinchfield said, "make sure they have their flu vaccine."