

Media and its consumers have room to improve

American media has never been more in the crosshairs than today. Like Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela and Vladimir Putin in Russia, U.S. President Donald Trump has made hay while hammering on a press that Trump describes as “fake” and the “enemy of the people.” And he has found a receptive audience. Trust in the media is at an all-time low. It is worth defining “media,” as the vague and often pejorative term means lots of things to different people. Disappointingly, to a growing number it means cable television news.

In January, about 2.8 million people watched Fox News each night during primetime, 1.2 million watched CNN and MSNBC had 1.1 million viewers. You can bet that can't-take-your-eyes-off-him Donald Trump was one reason for that increase, and likely a reason why those numbers will stay sky high.

At the same time, about 38 percent of Americans (120 million) claimed to read a newspaper on a regular basis according to a 2013 Pew Research study, down from 54 percent in 2004.

We are a newspaper, so we come from that journalistic perspective. We go to meetings, go to schools, go to businesses, tag along, talk to people, ask blunt and sometimes annoying questions, read budgets, go to wrecks, go to fires, write down what we see, write down what authorities tell us, ask more questions, then report.

We hope to do it with a mix of entertainment, humor and local flavor — but information is always at the core.

Cable news does television remarkably well. But the line between journalism and entertainment is often blurred there. Many news shows consist of pundits propping up, then attacking what are often straw man arguments from an opposition figure.

Talking heads are invited to voice a side of the issue, not to help the audience understand the issue. It's great television — especially if you have a dog in the fight — but often it's not journalism. It's borderline debate, it's definitely entertainment, and it's designed to keep you hooked. Like Doritos, it offers enough flavor to keep you coming back but not enough sustenance that you can put down your bag of chips.

One other way you can become “hooked” on empty calories is by emotional manipulation. If you watch a

segment on cable news or read an article online and come away from it incensed, furious and apoplectic, it is important to step back and ask yourself if you are being manipulated — and to what end.

That doesn't mean the best journalism doesn't cause intense reactions. We cover fatal accidents and fires and suicides and bankruptcies that can incense readers. But those powerful stories are buffeted by the daily grind of many others that move the narrative forward, give the reader context, include relevant facts and help round out the entire story. It's not always life-changing stuff, more often it's the day-to-day machinations of the world we live in and the government we pay for.

Perhaps you are willing to trust your government and its president implicitly, to take one person's word for what is fake and what is true. We believe that's dangerous and that good journalism is more important when it's under attack.

Our education system does too. In schools across the country, facts are paramount. Right answers get you credit and wrong answers get you bupkis. Learning how to research, how to think critically and how to reach the correct conclusion has long been the basis of learning.

That's why teachers are instructing students on how to be good consumers of news — to find secondary sources, look for bylines and contact information, research a publication's history and range of output and how to tell the difference between spin and fact. They are important reminders for all Americans now more than ever, as information designed to mislead is being pushed out in high number.

You should be suspicious of what you read, as journalists are trained to be whether looking at a press release, a government document or a note from an anonymous source. But you should be more trusting of outlets and journalists who show their work, who have a long history of revealing truths, who admit readily to errors, who don't play with your emotions and favor cold, hard (sometimes boring) fact. Some do that better than others, though none are perfect all the time. But you should be a wise consumer, not reading outlets based on whether you agree with their conclusions but those who make you smarter and more informed.

The media is going through the wringer right now, but it will outlive this era and — with your help — be better than before.



Public records are your records

By Kenneth Kramer
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

This week is Sunshine Week, an annual nationwide celebration of access of public information.

Public records are very serious business for newspapers because they form the backbone of most newspaper stories. Newspapers are the loudest ones screaming when legislators have the gall to attempt limiting public records. A reporter's paycheck may depend on how well he can dig up stories using public records.

Although governments usually give special treatment to journalists, you, as a citizen, have just as much right to access these records. If you don't know whether a record is public or not, just ask for it. It is the responsibility of the government to respond with the exact statute if they deny you. This makes it easy for you to look up the law.

When you're reading this newspaper today, I bet you can find at least one piece of information a reporter got from a government agency.

The term FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) is an acronym commonly used when describing the activity of accessing records from government agencies. But each state has a name for their own public records law.

“Public records” generally are defined as records, regardless of their physical form, made or received in connection with official government business. “Regardless



Kenneth Kramer

of physical form” means that public records come in various forms, not just paper records. They can also be electronic, such as email or data stored on government computers. They can also be photos, video or audio.

So, the emails of your mayor, a mugshot, video from a police dashcam, audio from a court hearing, the deed on your neighbor's property and their water usage may all be public records. Using your public records law, you can check out a health care provider. Just go to medical licensing board and request discipline reports on a doctor. You can find out if a psychiatrist was ever disciplined for sexual misconduct, substance abuse or has a record of overdrugging children. You can find out if a doctor has done any wrong-side surgery or a dentist has improperly done an extraction which resulted in complications.

If you request enough public records, you will see the free flow of information from government agencies. You get into a rhythm: You

ask, you receive, back and forth, on and on and things are sailing along smoothly, and then “Clunk!” The machine stops! Some attorney, trained to stop the flow and prevent access to records or some recalcitrant government worker or some state statute or agency “policy” slams the door shut! “Request Denied!” But don't let that stop you!

Just Google the statute they gave you in denying the records. Are they right or not? If not, ask them once again for the record and quote the statute.

There is a wide variation in public record laws since each state has its own statutes.

Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf signed a bill last year allowing criminal records to be sealed if an ex-offender stayed out of trouble for 10 years. New York divorce records are closed, but California's are open. Florida prohibited autopsy photos following the NASCAR crash death of Dale Earnhardt. The FBI won't release a record unless the subject of the records request has filled out a form or if the subject has died. (Plus they take forever in responding.)

Public records are your records. They are public. Governments are simply the custodians of the records.

Good luck on your search of public records!

Happy Sunshine Week!
Kenneth Kramer is a private investigator and public records expert. He can be reached at pi@datasearch.pro.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Open borders

To the Editor:
So, as you are in your home doing routine stuff, a strange family walks in uninvited through your unlocked back door and proceeds to rummage through your belongings and medicine cabinets, settles in to your bedroom and, finding the small stash of your emergency/vacation cash, immediately grabs on to it as their own.

They check out your refrigerator and pantry, and help themselves, and they send their kids to school, occupying the desks your own kids used to sit in — and, since one of the family wasn't feeling well, they went to the local ER and had the medical bill sent to you. And, yeah, since you were living on Social Security, they began grabbing your monthly checks for their own use.

Now, exactly what part of legal vs. illegal immigration do you not understand?

Gary Davidson
Canyon City

Our country has a long history of accepting a controlled volume of immigrants from other lands, but that has included the requirement that they meet qualifications and pass a test to obtain legal citizenship. In point of fact, our nation has had one of the most open doors regarding immigration, compared to many.

To throw all that away and rip the doors off our borders is an insult to the many who have entered our nation legally, and to the other citizens whose medical and retirement benefits have been paid into by a lifetime of their labor and taxes, neither of which the illegals have themselves contributed to, but have instantly benefited from.

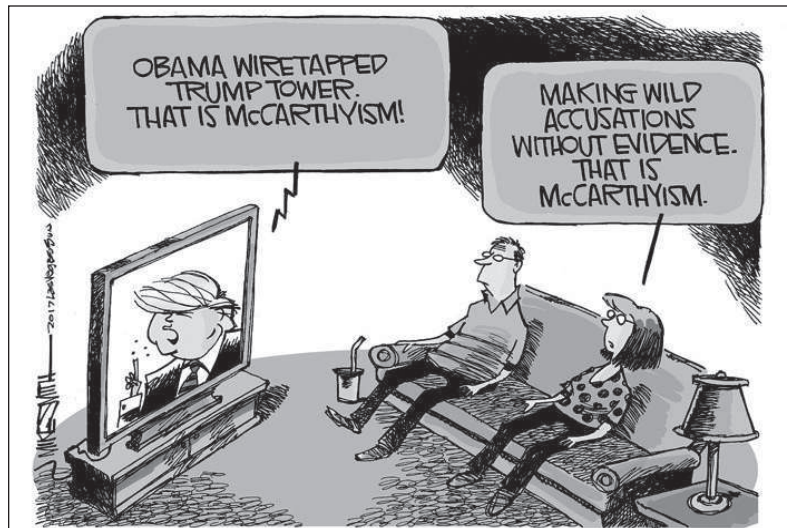
So, I ask again, exactly what part of legal vs. illegal immigration do you not understand?

Correcting health care

To the Editor:
We cannot afford to provide all the health care services every person may need. Politicians, insurance companies and health providers ration services through copays and deductibles, pricing and coverage issues and pre-authorization and waiting lists.

High-income groups buy Cadillac plans; middle income groups buy insurance augmented by employers and government subsidies; and the low income and uninsured get Medicaid. Obamacare rations services based on need, regardless of cost. The corrective is to base decisions on outcomes: the person's preexisting condition, current health status, family history and ability to improve.

Michael F. McCarthy
Hayward, CA



Blue Mountain EAGLE
PUBLISHED EVERY WEDNESDAY BY **EC MEDIA group**

Grant County's Weekly Newspaper

PUBLISHER..... MARISSA WILLIAMS, MARISSA@BMEAGLE.COM
EDITOR..... SEAN HART, EDITOR@BMEAGLE.COM
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT..... JACKIE OSBORNE, JACKIE@BMEAGLE.COM
REPORTER..... RYLAN BOGGS, RYLAN@BMEAGLE.COM
COMMUNITY NEWS..... ANGEL CARPENTER, ANGEL@BMEAGLE.COM
SPORTS..... ANGEL CARPENTER, ANGEL@BMEAGLE.COM
MARKETING REP..... KIM KELL, ADS@BMEAGLE.COM
OFFICE MANAGER..... LINDSAY BULLOCK, OFFICE@BMEAGLE.COM

1 YEAR SUBSCRIPTION RATES
(including online access)
Grant County\$40
Everywhere else in U.S.....\$51
Outside Continental U.S.....\$60
Subscriptions must be paid prior to delivery

Periodicals Postage Paid at John Day and additional mailing offices.
POSTMASTER
send address changes to:
Blue Mountain Eagle
195 N. Canyon Blvd.
John Day, OR 97845-1187

Copyright © 2017 Blue Mountain Eagle
All rights reserved. No part of this publication covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or copied in any form or by any means — graphic, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, taping or information storage and retrieval systems — without written permission of the publisher.