

Don't flag or lose faith. The Trump presidency has reinvigorated a level of interest in journalism not seen since Watergate. At the CUNY Journalism school, the number of applications last year were 40% higher than they were the year before. So long as journalists continue to do their jobs without fear or favor, I truly believe that the president's assault on the free press will not succeed.

Now, the second challenge facing journalism is also menacing, also existential: the arrival of the internet—the Huffington Post and BuzzFeed, followed closely by Twitter, Facebook, and social media—brought an end to the traditional business model for newspapers. Consumers expect their news instantaneously, and they often expect it to be free. Subscriptions and newsstand sales fell. Craigslist became the preferred destination for classified ads, the most reliable revenue stream for newspapers. Facebook, Twitter, and Google gobbled up the remaining ad revenue as venues for the journalism of others. I submit to you that it is not an accident that Facebook's home page is called the “news feed.”

Like a boat taking on water faster than it can be bailed out: newsrooms shrunk, the industry consolidated, and many once-revered papers simply sunk.

None of this is “news” as would you say—but the collapse of the newspaper's business model is still claiming victims. One area where it's particularly troubling to me is in smaller markets, in mid-sized and smaller cities. The most striking example I've seen is in upstate New York. Just a few years ago, the major newspaper in a town of 70,000 had fifteen full-time reporters. Now it has two.

For generations, local newspapers and television stations have been the glue that keeps small communities informed and stitched together. In a big city, there are many interlocking layers of civic life: social clubs, religious groups, sports teams, municipal organizations. But in many smaller cities and towns, the local paper is the most robust civic organization left in that community.

When Kodak was in Rochester, it looked out for its civic life, its charities, its communities. But there is no more Kodak. When the community bank headquartered in Elmira was purchased, a national bank came in and took much less interest in the community life of Elmira. When Walmart came in and supplanted every clothing and hardware store all across upstate, it eroded both the finances and social fabric of those communities. Local newspapers are one of the few institutions left in smaller cities and towns. Just anecdotally, cities with strong, successful papers—like Buffalo with the Buffalo News—tend to do better economically and those papers help foster a strong sense of community and connectedness.

So I have a particular concern when smaller papers and smaller television networks are forced to downsize, reorganize, or close.

Unfortunately, in my home state of New York, an already bleak picture just got bleaker. Last week, a hedge fund known as the “destroyer of newspapers” announced a bid to take over Gannet, which, in addition to USA Today, publishes four important papers in my state, all in mid-size to smaller cities: the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, the Binghamton Press & Sun, the Poughkeepsie Journal, and the Journal News in the Lower Hudson Valley.

For Alden Global Capital, the hedge fund, the acquisition and “streamlining” of Gannet newspapers might increase its profits a couple of percentage points. But the loss of the Binghamton Press & Sun and the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle would be incalculable.

The Gannet consortium was already the result of a consolidated news business, with

one reporter working multiple beats and placing stories in multiple newspapers. What was already an overburdened, under-resourced operation now faces potential annihilation by an indifferent media conglomerate backed by an even more indifferent hedge fund.

And in my view, losing a newspaper in Rochester is even worse than losing one in Dallas. I am left angry and searching for answers. What do we do about this?

I don't know how to solve the broader economic problem for newspapers big and small. Federal support is problematic beyond NPR and PBS. The press must remain adversarial; acting and appearing independent.

The only antidote to these problems I have seen is the rarer and rarer presence of generous, civic-minded families and individuals who own news outlets for the right reasons—not simply to maximize profits, although profit is still important, but because they feel an obligation to advance journalism for the greater benefit of us all. Newspapers that belong to families or trusts have been some of the few to survive the last two decades, isolated in part from market pressures.

Everyone has seen this work at places like the Globe, the Times, and the Post, but the family model has worked in smaller markets as well. The Watertown Times, for example, is owned by the Johnson family and it does as much for the North Country in upstate New York as any institution.

I would propose, to you and your broader audience, that charitably-inclined institutions and individuals should begin to think of journalism as a philanthropic endeavor. The plight of the Fourth Estate should move the conscience of the nation. If it became a worthy endeavor to buy a local paper and preserve its size and independence—just as it's a worthy endeavor to support the local hospital, school, or charity—many more might consider doing it.

The Guardian, for example, operates on a reader-donation model—which funds its entire online presence. Journalism is a public good. From philanthropists to average readers: we should all start treating it as such.

This is just one idea. I'm sure there are better ones. God knows I don't have the answers. But from where I stand, I see the same problems that you all understand so well, and I am pained for solutions.

Because, throughout history, the Fourth Estate has always kept our government in check when it's gone astray, perhaps more than anywhere else around the world. We rely on newspapers to inform our citizens, shine a light on injustice, establish the facts, and hold elected officials like me accountable. A free and robust Fourth Estate is how we discern democracy from autocracy and guard against the slide from one to the other.

This is a time when many of us who have had complete faith in the wellspring of democracy that has graced our country genuinely worry if it will endure.

The fact that you, the free press, are there at the bulwark—independent, strong, and fearless, in cities big and small—gives me solace that despite our current peril, the greatness of America will ultimately prevail.

As Americans, we must continue to support the First Amendment; the freedom—and viability—of the press. It's nothing short of a moral imperative.

Thank you.

Mr. SCHUMER. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT ACT—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 47, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 47) to provide for the management of the natural resources of the United States, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Murkowski/Manchin Modified Amendment No. 111, in the nature of a substitute.

Murkowski Amendment No. 112 (to Amendment No. 111), to modify the authorization period for the Historically Black Colleges and Universities Historic Preservation program.

Rubio/Scott (FL) Amendment No. 182 (to Amendment No. 112), to give effect to more accurate maps of units of the John H. Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System that were produced by digital mapping.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip is recognized.

GREEN NEW DEAL

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, last Thursday, Democrats released their plan for a Green New Deal, although “plan” might be a bit of a stretch. It is more like a wish list because while Democrats announced their desired outcomes like getting rid of fossil fuels or upgrading every single building in the United States, they provided no details at all about how to get there. In particular, they failed to provide any details on how to pay for the staggering costs of what they are proposing to do.

Take just one provision of the Democrats' green wish list: “Upgrading all existing buildings in the United States and building new buildings to achieve maximum energy efficiency, water efficiency, safety, affordability, comfort, and durability, including through electrification.” That is a direct quote from the so-called plan, upgrading all existing buildings—all existing buildings.

Well, the cost of that provision alone is practically inconceivable, but that is just a small fraction of what the Democrats want to do. Their wish list also includes “meeting 100 percent of the power demand in the United States through clean, renewable, and zero-emission energy sources, including by dramatically expanding and upgrading renewable power sources and by deploying new capacity; overhauling