



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Ask who reported death of newspaper

Where was it that you heard about the so-called demise of the newspaper?

Probably, you read about it in your daily newspaper; because, as Mark Twain, a journalist himself, was able to write to a friend: "The report of my death was an exaggeration." And a good newspaper will go on to explain the source of the rumor, and if false, will present the facts that debunk it.

Well into the 21st century, American newspapers are as relevant as ever, because like other vital segments of their community, they are always at work and always looking to reinvent themselves. We've seen this in high-profile deals such as Jeff Bezos' acquisition of *The Washington Post*; but we've also seen dramatic changes nationally at newspapers large and small, as their news, advertising, marketing and circulation staffs have embraced a variety of digital and social media platforms to reach new and existing readers, while continuing to present the news in the traditional print format.

But the modes of communication are not the most important change: That is in the way that the newspaper has greatly expanded its role as watchdog for the community.

Trust in our public institutions is on a steady decline, and sturdy journalism is going to be the only reliable way for average Americans to glean the truth from a stream of conflicting information disseminated by political partisans and vested interests.

In the past year, newspapers were the leading source of information on these stories of vital importance in their communities and nationwide:

- *The Denver Post* conveyed news via text, social media and video of the gunman who killed 12 moviegoers in Aurora, Colo., while the tragic events still were occurring.

- *The Tennessean* in Nashville called attention to Tennessee's Department of Children's Services' inability to account for the deaths or near-deaths over a three-year period of approximately 200 children who were in custody or whose welfare was being monitored by the state. The reports led to the department head's resignation and a restructure of the department.

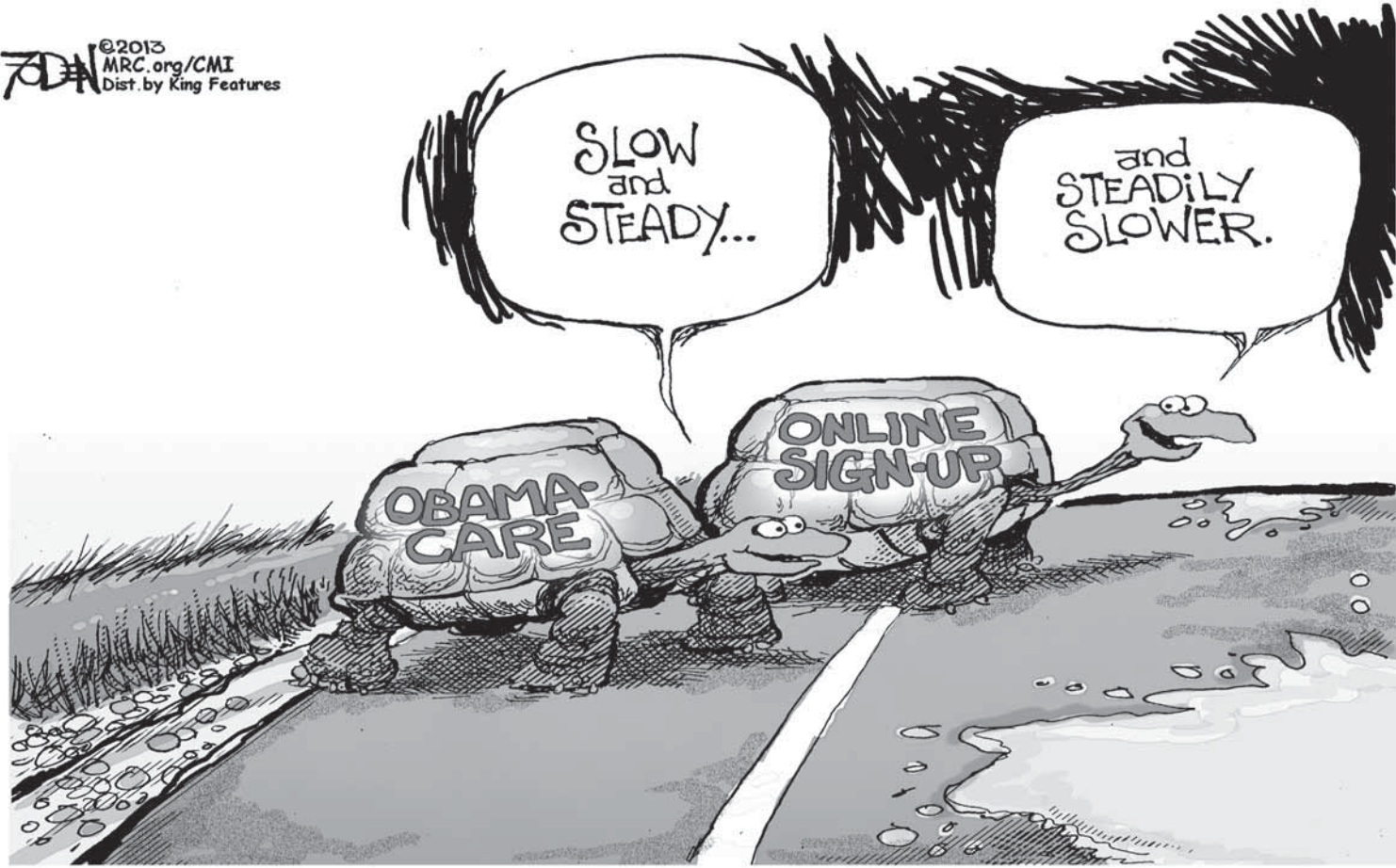
- An investigation by *The Sun Sentinel* of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., uncovered widespread cases of off-duty police officers' reckless driving.

In each case, the newspaper looked to its role as a voice for the entire community it serves.

Despite all the obituaries being written about newspapers, we look at these examples and many more and find that newspapers are amazingly spry and alert — and always at work.

— Ted R. Rayburn, *The Tennessean*

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UPDATE FROM THE INFORMATION SUPER HIGHWAY

### Travel's fun, but overload is on its way

I love to travel, but I'm getting a little tired of seeing the world through a windshield.

Trips are just plain more fun when you have a chance to anticipate them before going somewhere and then savor them after returning home.

This year, I've just gone and gone and gone, and not had a lot of time to anticipate or savor.

I think the whole thing started with our trip to Turkey — a wonderful experience, but one that I would have preferred to have been able to prepare for better and taken time afterwards to remember at leisure.

But I was in the hospital. Then our son had that little lawnmower accident in Lawrence. Then I was back in the hospital to repair my original problem, and the trip was here before I was half ready for it.

I loved every minute of my time in Turkey, but it was a running trip. We were on a bus, train or plane for what seemed like 50 percent of the time we were in that lovely country. The other 50 percent was spent learning and sight seeing. Sleep and leisure time were just not on the itinerary.

Then we flew back to Omaha, drove home and turned around and left for Flagstaff, Ariz.,



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

the next day. We didn't even take time to wash our clothes. We tossed what was left of our clean underwear and a few T-shirts into our suitcases and took off again.

In Flagstaff, we attended a railroad history convention and took an excursion to the Grand Canyon.

I'm hoping to go back to that scenic wonder sometime when I can enjoy it more and not think of it as an incredibly large, colorful hole in the ground.

I need time to absorb things, and they were coming all too fast.

I barely had time to download my pictures from my camera to the computer and it was time to head for Colorado.

Then we were on to Phoenix for the National Newspaper Association convention and a

baseball game between the Arizona Diamondbacks and the Colorado Rockies.

Back home for a week, then it was back to Colorado, but not Denver. We go to southern Colorado and it takes from nine to 12 hours to get there, depending on how many stops we make.

I was home eight hours — most of them in bed — then it was off to work for 10 hours and off to Dodge City for a Kansas Press meeting. When that was done, we drove to Abilene for Chisholm Trail Days, then back home the next day.

Who! Can someone stop this train? Nope, it's time to head for Arkansas with my sister to visit our last uncle and aunt, both in their 80s.

Maybe next month or next year, I'll slow down. But then, I suppose, I'd start to complain that I never get to do anything or go anywhere.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

### Write us

The *Colby Free Press* encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form.

### COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963  
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

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Sharon Friedlander - Publisher  
sriedlander@nwkansas.com

#### NEWS

R.B. Headley - Sports Editor  
colby.sports@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor  
mballard@nwkansas.com

Sam Dieter - News Reporter  
colby.editor@nwkansas.com

Heather Alwin - Society Editor  
colby.society@nwkansas.com

#### ADVERTISING

colby.ads@nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard - Advertising Representative  
kballard@nwkansas.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design  
khunter@nwkansas.com

#### BUSINESS OFFICE

Office Manager

Melissa Edmondson - Office Manager  
medmondson@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator  
support@nwkansas.com

#### NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager  
Gary Stewart, Foreman

Jim Jackson, Jim Bowker, Pressmen

Kris McCool, Judy McKnight, Tracy Traxel,  
Sheri Arroyo, Mailing

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### Limit government overreach on news

The nation learned in May that the Justice Department secretly obtained the phone records of more than 100 Associated Press reporters and monitored Fox News reporter James Rosen's personal e-mail and cell phone records, branding him a "possible co-conspirator" in a classified leak case for asking questions of a government source.

These revelations sent shock waves through newsrooms nationwide. Reporters can no longer assure their sources that interviews will remain confidential, because there is no way to tell whether the government is listening.

This attack on journalism reaches far beyond hard-working reporters and their sources. Make no mistake: The ultimate victims are the millions of Americans who rely on investigative journalism to inform them about their government and their communities. When the government casts a chilling effect on newsrooms, it keeps important news away from the American public.

In Washington, real change often occurs in response to a crisis. That is precisely what is happening here. For centuries, the American public has assumed that journalists are the public's watchdog, overseeing and revealing government abuses. But the AP and Fox News stories have exposed a sad truth: The government is spying on journalists. The only way to limit this government overreach is through passage of a law that lays out clear rules for when the government can obtain information from the press.

Members of Congress from across the political spectrum recognized that need when in May they proposed the Free Flow of Information Act of 2013, which would prohibit federal prosecutors, criminal defendants or civil litigants from subpoenaing information from journalists unless they convince a federal judge that the need for the information outweighs the public interest in the free flow of information.

This "shield law" would be a huge improvement from the current federal system, which

### Other Opinions

• Caroline Little  
Newspaper Assoc.

enables prosecutors to decide whether to notify the media of a subpoena and how broad the request should be without any oversight or any chance for the press to challenge these government actions.

Rep. Ted Poe, a Texas Republican and a former judge, said that he sponsored the shield law because maintaining confidentiality for reporters' sources "is critical to ensuring the free flow of information without government interference."

His co-sponsor, Rep. John Conyers, a Michigan Democrat, noted that 49 states and the District of Columbia have laws to protect journalists' sources.

"It is long past time that our federal government provides similar protections," Sen. Conyers said.

Sens. Charles Schumer, R-N.Y., and Lindsey Graham, R-Fla., co-sponsored a similar measure in the Senate. Schumer aptly observed that a law is needed, as "there's no supervision." President Obama recently even the administration's support for a shield law and said that journalists "should not be at legal risk for doing their jobs."

The response can be summed up in one word, which is rare these days in Washington: bipartisanship. The swift reaction of legislators of both parties demonstrates that press freedom is not a Democratic or a Republican talking point. It is a quintessentially American value that transcends politics and shaped our nation's founding. As Thomas Jefferson famously wrote, the "only security of all is in a free press."

### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

