

## GUEST EDITORIAL

### Big Tech is steamrolling America's newspapers

Google and Facebook have enormous economic and political power in society — especially over the news industry. Many ask if they have played a role in the misinformation that erodes our free press and plagues our democracy.

Google and Facebook have a duopoly of the distribution of digital news content, which drives people to their platforms where they make money. The platforms hoard critical data and use clever tactics, such as reframing stories in rich previews, to keep users on their sites — siphoning off the advertising revenue that small and local publishers need and weakening their ability to be rewarded for their own content. Google and Facebook generated \$4 million in U.S. advertising revenue every 15 minutes during the first quarter of 2022. That amount could fund hundreds of local journalists in every state in the country.

It's no wonder that, despite record news consumption, local newspapers across the country have seen diminished revenues — leading many to lay off journalists or go out of business. Local newspapers simply can't compete with these national platforms, Google and Facebook. The imbalance of power between these platforms and local newspapers — let alone any single local paper — is so vast that newspapers cannot negotiate the exploitation of news. But antitrust laws shield Google and Facebook from the possibility of news publishers working together to demand better terms.



BRETT WESNER

No company should have this much control over the news. Congress must take action to curb undue influence of Big Tech on the news media industry — and the Journalism Competition and Preservation Act, known as JCPA, aims to do just that.

The JCPA is specifically designed to address Google's and Facebook's anti-competitive practices. The proposed legislation would provide a temporary, limited antitrust safe harbor for small and local news publishers to collectively negotiate with Facebook and Google for fair compensation for the use of their content. The policy also incentivizes and rewards publishers who invest in their journalists and newsroom personnel, awarding outlets with demonstrated investments in their staff a larger portion of the funds that result from the negotiations.

By addressing Google's and Facebook's monopoly power and ensuring more subscription and advertising dollars flow back to publishers, the JCPA not only protects and promotes quality news, but also encourages competition.

In today's partisan political climate, it is rare for Democrats and Republicans to agree on anything — but the JCPA is one important exception. Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle agree: we need to pass the JCPA to ensure that publishers — especially small and local publishers — are treated fairly and can serve their communities.

**Brett Wesner, chair of the National Newspaper Association, is president of Wesner Publications in Cordell, Oklahoma.**

## COMMENTARY

### Mother Nature is sending us wake-up calls on climate change

By Mary Jo Bibby  
Member of Citizens for a Sustainable Future,  
Alexandria, MN

Mother Nature is sending us wake-up calls. She is urging us to get serious about confronting the detrimental effects of human-induced climate change. Our atmosphere now holds the most carbon ever recorded since the pre-industrial age. CO2 and other toxic gases act like a blanket that traps the earth's heat, causing the earth's average temperature to rise to the highest levels in 11,000 years.

Our climate crisis is causing extreme weather events which are becoming more common. A megadrought is currently affecting the Colorado River Basin which fills Lake Mead, the country's largest reservoir that provides water to millions of people in the Southwest. Record heat and drought have caused wildfires that have burned three million acres so far this year — almost three times the 10-year average. Increased evaporation also causes more frequent heavy downpours. Recent flooding in Yellowstone National Park washed away roads and bridges as thousands of visitors were ordered to evacuate the

park. Worldwide, the picture is even grimmer.

Recognizing the need for action to mitigate the damaging effects of burning coal, gas and oil is not a recent concern. For three decades the "Conference of Parties" — COPs — has brought almost every county on earth together for global summits, bringing together negotiators, governments, scientists, businesses and citizens. At the 2015 COP21, known as the "Paris Accord," every country agreed to work together to limit average global warming to 2 degrees Celsius (3.6F) and to aim for 1.5 degrees Celsius. Unfortunately, this warming target is much lower than where civilization is currently heading.

Although a few degrees may not seem like it should cause a significant impact on our planet, we must consider that this is an average global temperature. The average must account for our vast oceans which absorb an enormous share of the additional heat generated by rising carbon levels, leaving the actual land part of earth where people actually live much hotter than those few degrees would indicate. To prevent catastrophic climate conditions, we must

achieve a 50 percent reduction in CO2 emissions by the end of this decade. Cutting emissions is critical if we are to lessen the odds for more frequent and record-breaking extreme events — melting ice sheets causing sea levels to rise, severe droughts affecting crop yields, warmer temperatures drying vegetation which burn more easily, and heavier downpours causing devastating floods.

The effects of our climate crisis are indeed dire, but experts maintain we are capable of limiting further warming. We must quickly transition to renewable sources of energy and reach net zero emissions as soon as possible. Decreasing our reliance on fossil fuels in the long run will offer huge economic and social benefits, costing consumers less, creating jobs in multiple sectors, reducing our reliance on foreign sources and protecting biodiversity. Improving our air quality will save thousands of lives and trillions of dollars in healthcare costs. We have the technology and the knowledge to avert a climate catastrophe. We can demonstrate our hope and concern for future generations by educating ourselves.

### 10-year-olds do get pregnant, sadly

The furor over the pregnant 10-year-old rape victim in Ohio forced to travel to Indiana for an abortion reminded me of a 10-year-old girl I met while working in Alabama.

She was pregnant, too. She had been raped by her mother's boyfriend and by the time I met her, she was too far along in her pregnancy for an abortion. She was an elementary school student who was not allowed to attend school because of the consternation it would cause her classmates.

A 10-year-old going for regular checkups with the obstetrician. A fourth-grade student who should have been writing reports about butterflies or the Atlantic Ocean, learning whatever it is that fourth-graders learn. Instead, she spent her days in her family's trailer, hiding her swollen belly.

One of my friends in Alabama told me about her. I was working as a reporter for the Mobile Press-Register. I spent time with the girl's family. I talked to her. She didn't have much to say and for me, years away from being a mom, I didn't have the skills to draw out a 10-year-old.

A 10-year-old having a baby. There were murmurs that yes, it was too late for an abortion, but also, that



KAREN TOLKKINEN  
Karen's Turn

the girl's family possibly opposed abortion. It was easier to avoid making a decision until it was too late.

As a reporter, I'm accustomed to setting aside my personal feelings about an issue. This time, I was angry. I met the girl's mom, jailed for an unrelated offense. I was so angry that she had failed to protect her daughter that I'm sure it showed in my eyes. The interview did not go well.

Pregnancies harm young girls. The unborn leaches calcium from the girl's growing body at a time when she needs it herself. Her pelvis is not fully developed, restricting the birth canal. They can develop debilitating fistulas, which are holes between the vaginal wall and the rectum or bladder. I can't even begin to imagine the toll on her mental health, her ability to form normal relationships and live a normal life.

In 2020, 1,765 girls age 14 and under gave birth in the United States, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Kid

Count Data Center. How many of them were age 10, I don't know.

The more time I spent with the girl and her family, the sadder and angrier I grew. By that time, I was beginning to internalize society's growing criticisms of the news media. I worried that I was victimizing the girl more than she had already been. I worried about "splashing her story across the front page of the newspaper." (I heard that voice almost audibly, spoken with dripping disdain.) I figured that my presence in her life was the last thing she needed.

So I dropped the story. I decided to leave her alone. I heard she had a healthy baby. I think it was a boy. I never wrote about her until now.

Now she would be in her late 20s or early 30s, I suppose. I have thought about her often in the decades since I met her, a quiet, shy, chubby-faced girl, living with her grandparents in a trailer in rural Alabama. I wonder how she turned out. What happened to her baby. What she thinks of Alabama banning abortions except when the life of the mother is in danger. No exceptions for 10-year-old victims of rape.

**"It's Our Turn" is a weekly column that rotates among members of the Echo Press editorial staff.**

## COMMENTARY

### Let's make our streets in Alexandria safer

By Jennifer Erickson  
Alexandria, MN

On Oct. 14, 2021, I was involved in a tragic fatal pedestrian accident. Please allow me to share my story and thoughts on how to make the streets of Alexandria safer.

At 7:15 a.m., I was driving to school with my children. It was a dark and wet morning. I turned east onto Third Avenue from Broadway Street (near Counselor Realty). I was paying attention to morning traffic, my phone was in my bag in my trunk, and my kids were quiet. As I neared Hawthorne Street, I looked over my right shoulder to merge so I could exit at Kenwood Street. It was at this moment that I hit an individual crossing the street. Many lives were changed in an instant.

We need to come together as drivers, pedestrians, and city planners to make our streets safer. Here's what we can do to watch out for each other:

- Drivers:
- Develop a habit of noticing every crosswalk on your regular driving route.
  - Make eye contact with crossing pedestrians and wave to acknowledge them. Help watch for quickly

approaching vehicles.

- Avoid unnecessary lane movement on streets with frequent crosswalks.
- Be extra cautious if you drive a larger vehicle. Pedestrians are two to three times more likely to suffer fatal injuries when struck by an SUV or pickup.

Pedestrians:

- Be visible. If you are crossing a street in the dark, wear reflective clothing or cross at a controlled intersection.
- Be aware of your location in relation to hills, stoplights or turns which may affect your visibility to drivers.
- Never assume drivers see you. Make eye contact with drivers and do not enter the roadway until traffic has stopped.

Local highway safety committees:

- Add lighted beacons to crosswalks so pedestrians can cross safely in the dark.
- Maintain crosswalks with freshly painted stripes and flashing signs.
- Reduce barely utilized or unsafe crosswalks to emphasize others. There are fourteen crosswalks in 0.6 miles on Third Avenue.
- Make safety a top priority and put plans into action.

Your life is precious, so please stay safe.

## LETTER

### Your vote matters; make a plan to vote

To the editor:

Let's make the 2022 elections a coordinated movement of informed people working together to elect law-makers who will champion justice, accountability and equity.

Mark your calendar for the primary election on Aug. 9, and the general election on Nov. 8. With our votes we can elect leg-

islators who will work for us, protect our democracy, and defend and expand the right to vote.

If you're new to voting, be assured that it is the job of caring and efficient election officials and poll workers to see that you are guided through the registration and voting process. They'll make sure you register in the correct precinct. They'll keep your ballot private and the polls safe.

This is true at both your polling place and with early voting at the Douglas County Auditor's office. After 40 years as an election judge, I can attest that voting systems in Minnesota, are not only easily accessible, they are honest. For more information go to the Minnesota Secretary of State website, <https://mnvotes.sos.state.mn.us>

**Barbara Benson  
Alexandria MN**

### New paid political letter policy takes effect

The Echo Press paid political letter policy is now in effect — with changes from previous elections.

Election-related letters to the editor advocating for or against a candidate, ballot measure or political party will be considered ads and are subject to a charge for the first 7 inches — \$17.50 if the letter-writer submits their content online through our business partner, Modulist.news, or \$22.50 if we enter the letter in for you. After that, the cost is \$11.50 for each additional inch. A 7-inch letter generally contains about 150 words.

The maximum length of a paid letter is 250 words. As with other letters to the editor, they must be submitted with the writer's name, address and phone number (only the writer's name and city are published). Unlike regular letters to the editor, paid letters are not limited to one letter per 30 days.

You can submit your letter online through our trusted editorial content submission platform at Modulist.news. From there, you will need to sign up for an account so we have your contact information. That way, if we need to reach out to you, we have it.

After you sign up, you can create a new listing for a "Community Engagement Letter," which is what we are calling election-related letters.

For the Tuesday, Aug. 9 primary election, the last batch of paid political letters will be published on Wednesday, Aug. 3 and no new issues may be raised. The deadline for submitting a paid letter for the Aug. 3 issue is 11 a.m. on Monday, Aug. 1 and must be done through Modulist. No paid letters will be published in the Friday, Aug. 5 issue.

For help or questions, please call the Modulist team at 701-241-5509. One of the team members will answer your questions, or be able to walk you through any obstacles. Or you can contact the Echo Press at 320-763-3133.