

OPINION

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OUR VIEW

Journalism sustainability bill reintroduced

IT'S NO SECRET THAT MANY newspapers — from metro dailies to community weeklies — have been hammered by economic forces. Because 85-90 percent of a newspaper's costs are supported by print advertising, the funds available to support local newspaper journalism continue to shrink.

Losses have stemmed from fewer locally managed retailers, economic contraction during the recession and, now, the pandemic. After decades of belt-tightening to survive, many newspaper owners and operators are simply closing down.

But there may be a light at the end of the tunnel for newsrooms and advertisers alike.

A growing list of bipartisan co-sponsors in Congress are making a second push for legislation that would help local newspapers through tax credits under the Local Journalism Sustainability Act.

The proposal, House Resolution 7640, was introduced in the House in July 2020 by U.S. Reps. Ann Kirkpatrick, D-Ariz., and Dan Newhouse, R-Wash. It drew 78 co-sponsors but didn't make it out of the House Ways and Means Committee.

Last month it was reintroduced by Kirkpatrick and Newhouse and now has 78 co-sponsors — 58 Democrats and 20 Republicans.

The University of North Carolina School of Journalism and Media reported in 2018 that 1,800 local newspapers had closed in the previous decade.

Many have searched for solutions in digital publishing. But since the modern Internet emerged as a publishing tool in early 1990s, digital revenues have amounted to a pittance for local publishers.

All indications are that digital revenues will support only grand economies of scale, like the social media networks or national publications. The need to increase local support, then, has become increasingly acute if communities are going to continue to have local newspapers.

The bill would set up tax credits to encourage local support:

- Subscribers would receive up to \$250 a year in tax credits to pay for their local newspaper subscriptions.
- Publishers would be aided in salary supports for journalists of up to \$25,000 for the first year and \$15,000 each of the next four years to help newspapers hire and pay salaries of journalists.
- Advertisers would be reimbursed for local ads for up to \$5,000 the first year and \$2,500 each of the next four years.

Nowadays the Internet is full of content. But when online news is curated and replicated across media networks, the original compilers of the facts are almost always supported by a local news outlet.

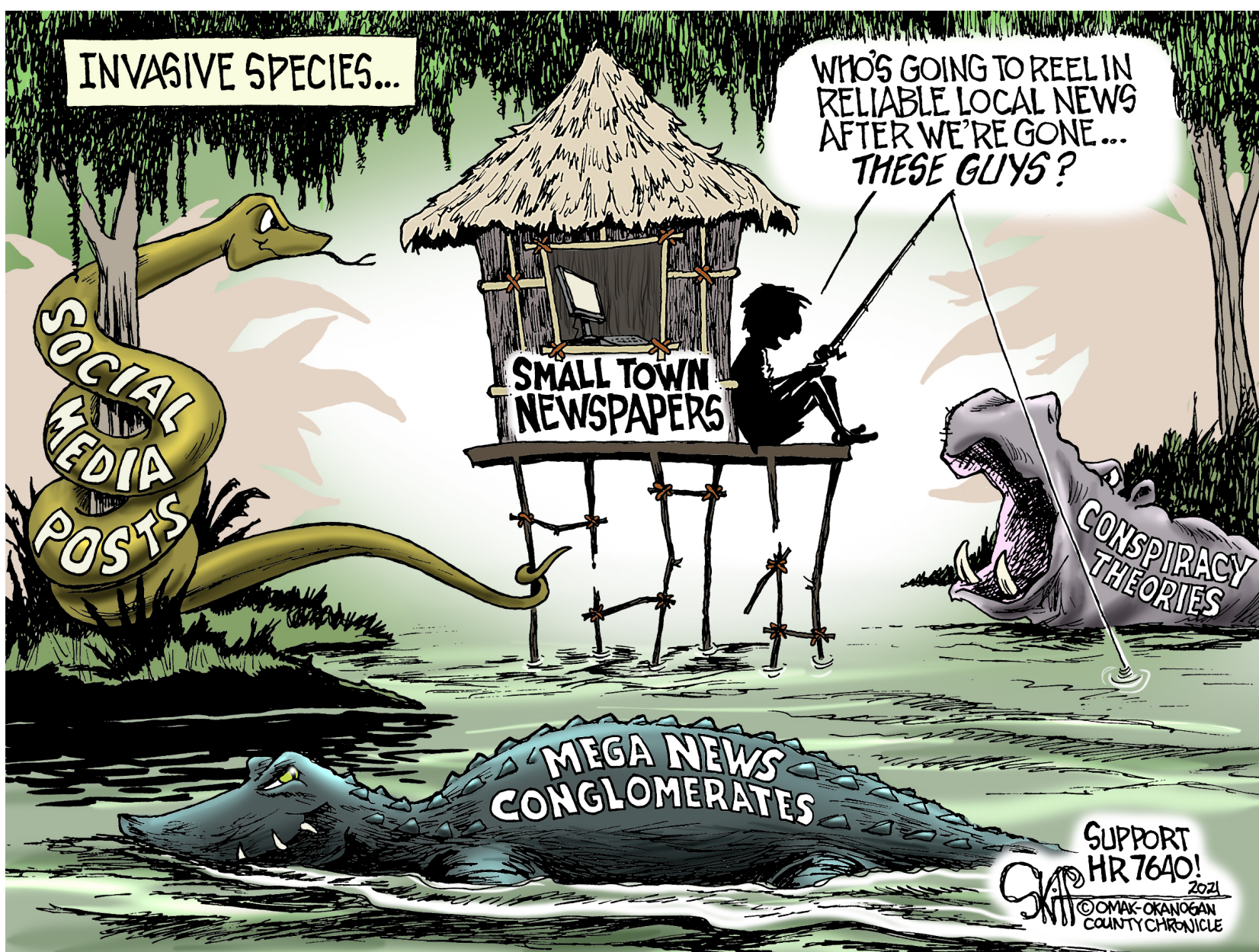
Responsible journalism is critical, but particularly in an era where manipulation of social media has led many to distrust the news entirely. When the news comes from reporters local citizens know and trust, reliable news forms a basis for informed democracy.

Communities need local newspapers, and local newspapers need support. We urge Congress to move on the Local Journalism Sustainability Act.

CORRECTIONS

The Chronicle staff strives to be accurate. If errors occur we want to correct them promptly. If you believe a correction is warranted, please call 509-826-1110 or 800-572-3446 between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

A brief in the June 16 issue inaccurately reported Jessica Russell had been issued an infraction for a non-moving violation. Russell, who was struck by a vehicle in Tonasket, was transported to North Valley Hospital before being airlifted to Harborview Medical Center in Spokane. Her family said she has suffered extensive injuries.



FROM THE DESK OF THE CHIEF

Bill 1310 brings hindrance to law enforcement

HELLO EVERYONE. I HAVE not written as many articles from the chief as I intended.

I have to be honest, I have been struggling with what to write with our recent legislation out of Olympia, as I am reading other police chiefs' news articles across the state, attending legal updates from the Washington Association of Sheriff's and Chief's of Police, and gaining insight from legal advisers and risk managers.

Our State of Washington has fundamentally shifted the way law enforcement provides services to our community.

House Bill 1310 — I highly encourage you to read the full bill — has created a tremendous hindrance to effective law enforcement.

While others have commented on the intent of the legislation being a realignment of how social services are provided and by whom, in our small communities that do not have the infrastructure or resources we, the police, have been that service provider.

When we are the entity that is called typically we go and figure it out and are the navigators for who best to provide follow-up services.

With the effective date July 25, 2021, we will no longer be able to



DAN CHRISTENSEN



respond to certain types of calls.

What HB 1310 effectively did is take away the ability to use force for community care-taking: Welfare checks, mental health episodes, civil standbys, runaway juveniles and other services not criminal in nature.

Use of force is also not defined in the legislation and can be interpreted to any unwanted physical contact. Force also includes a "seizure" of a person.

The high legal burden, which ironically is not defined by law but is a legal concept, is probable cause. In the past the police had the ability to use force under the standard of reasonable suspicion.

In fact, if there is no immediate and imminent threat, officers are now expected among other tactics to leave

the scene to exhaust all de-escalation tactics.

This is a fundamental shift and moves away from the broken window theory. That theory is when we, the police, get involved at lower and lesser levels and intercept that behavior or activity.

Now, with this legislation and many others including HB 1054, we will be moving from a preventive or proactive role to a reactive and investigative role.

I assure you we will do our best within the confines of the law — all of us have sworn to protect our Constitution and laws, whether popular or not. We must and shall follow the law.

I have met with the sheriff and police chiefs of Okanogan County many times over the last few months and I have met with our representatives, legislators and council members of our county.

I am not certain that our legislative branch fully realized the unintended consequences of these law changes to our community's expectation of services.

What we do know is our representation of law enforcement (WASPC) was told that they do not want to hear from the police, they heard our comments and concerns and frankly they do not care what the police have to say.

It will be important for legislators to hear from their own constituents, if this is through your professional associations or even individually.

The Kent Police Department has some great videos online about the

changes in the law and how we have started implementing those changes. Part of being law-based is when we are aware of the legislative intent we do not wait for that date, we as the police start the implementation as a ship moves slowly it will take time to change course.

The police chief of Moses Lake commented on an article in the Columbia Basin Herald.

I am committed to navigating our police department through these changes.

We are a civilian police force and we derive our authority from the people, who are represented by the Legislature. The people have spoken, and we will deliver services as prescribed by law.

This may frustrate our public locally who are represented by larger populations in the Legislature. I ask that you please share your frustrations, if any, with our representatives of the people. I will be focusing more resources into investigations and away from some of our patrol activities as this will be how we best hold those who do not want to adhere to the norms of behavior of our society.

These law changes do not change when you see something call, let us triage how we respond. I look forward to sharing more insight from the desk of the chief.

DAN CHRISTENSEN is the chief of police for the City of Omak. He can be reached at www.omakcity.org. For emergencies, dial 911.

GUEST OPINION

City leaders extend thanks for care on Fourth

I WANT TO EXTEND MY SINCERE appreciation to all of the citizens who adhered to the emergency ban on fireworks during the Fourth of July weekend.

For several years now we have used the East Side Park as a "free zone" for the purpose of being able to maintain control over what has always been a fear of elevated fire danger as well as having immediate access to other first responders when necessary.

It has worked (mostly) and may work again in the future. This year, the unbelievable and early heat wave

caused apprehension of your local leadership in allowing the activity.

When the leadership of the tribe banned the sale and use of fireworks on the reservation, it made perfect sense to join with them and the county in an all-out ban. We collectively chose to err on the side of caution.

A huge thank you is due the citizens for abiding by the ban. It's because of your cooperation that together, we acted in protection of our community.

The Omak Volunteer Fire Department would like to thank the citizens of Omak and surrounding area for

their part in a safe and quiet Fourth of July.

As we continue to protect life and property your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Kevin Bowling
Omak Fire Chief



KEVIN BOWLING

Incidentally, we had information that a person with behavioral health crisis was intending to light fires under the cover of fireworks.

Though a few fires were set, we are working on determining if we can establish probable cause for an arrest. The fires were extinguished by our public.

Officers were very busy with call load over the weekend. Like all of you I am looking forward to some cooler weather.

Dan Christensen
Omak Chief of Police

Contact your state lawmakers

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