

## Free Press Viewpoint

### President wrong to pick Fox fight

In one corner is President Barack Obama and in the other is Fox News. MSNBC wants to be the one-sided referee.

The number of rounds has not been determined. But bets are on Fox.

The old saying comes quickly to mind that when challenging a newspaper: "Never argue with someone who buys his ink by the barrel."

That's sort of what the president is doing in his fight with Fox News. The president, in this case, is wrong. It would be to his benefit to appear on that network, and make sure Fox is on the president's invitation list, along with the other news folks in the capital.

President Obama, we believe, has received some bad advice. And being on the outs with probably the most watched of the three major cable news outlets isn't doing him any good.

If the president believes in the First Amendment's right of free speech, he can't continue to simply brush off Fox News. While they do go negative many times when referring to the president, that's what the First Amendment is all about — freedom of opinion, expression — speech! MSNBC treated President George W. Bush much like Fox is treating President Obama.

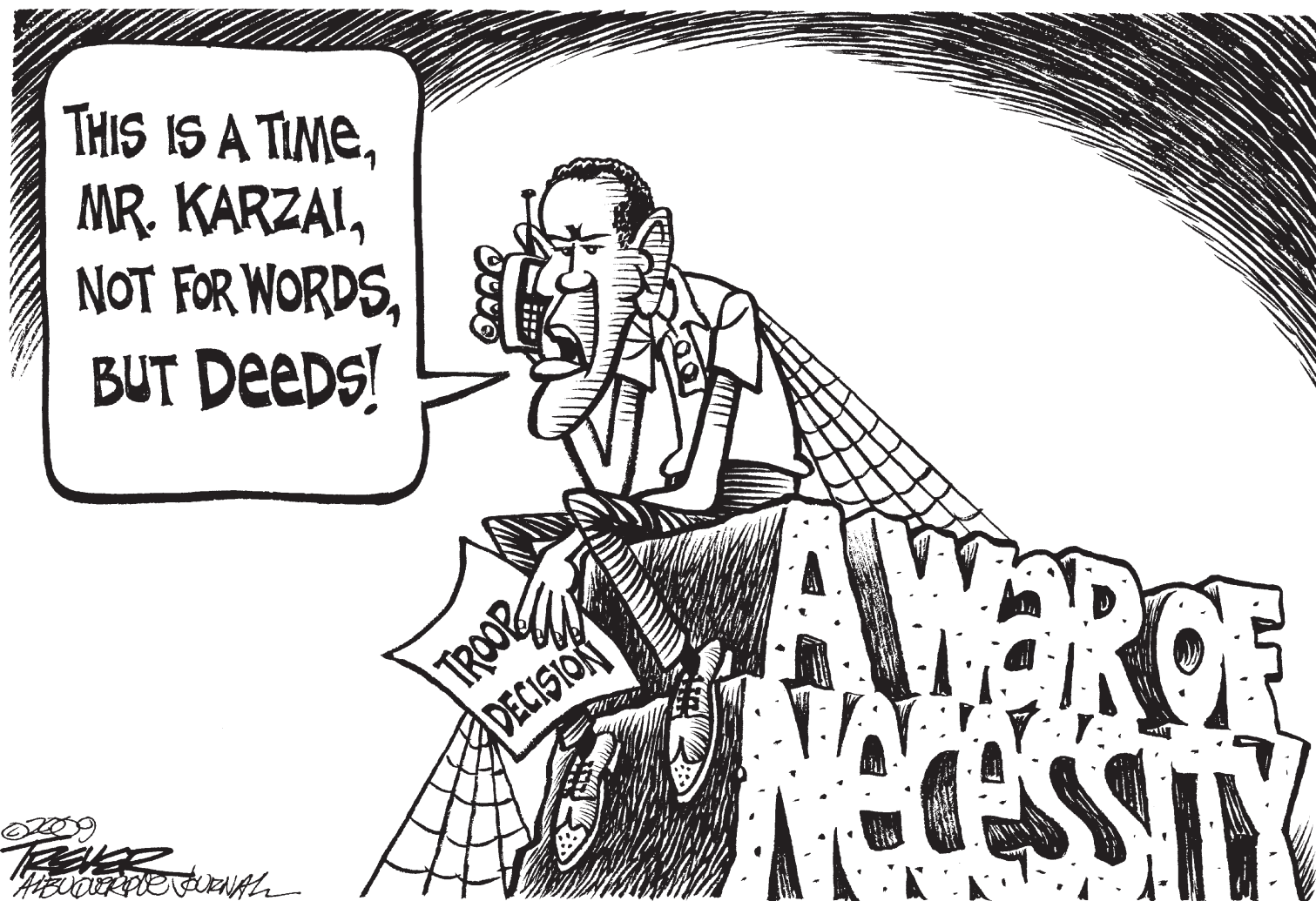
Ask yourself, "Is this nonissue worth the attention it's getting?"

No! It's petty. At a time when the death toll of brave American soldiers in Afghanistan is on the rise, we don't need to place the Obama-Fox squabble in the same folder. That's irresponsible and an insult.

If MSNBC would tone it down, this Obama-Fox split just might blow over. But MSNBC sometimes comes across as the president's shield, forgetting the attacks it laid on President Bush.

A lot of hate in our country today can be blamed on the likes of Fox News and MSNBC, plus a host of left/right lightweight nitwits on the radio. Their respective viewers and listeners are dedicated, and unfortunately believe just about everything their choice channel or radio dial spits out. But the First Amendment allows for all of this. And while we could only hope for better judgment, that's not happening.

— Tom Dreiling  
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### Newspapers not ready to roll up and die

Newspaper people ought to be incensed with the Knight Foundation, an organization formed from one of the nation's great newspaper fortunes which seeks pretty much to eliminate the newspaper from tomorrow's world.

The James S. and John L. Knight foundation is named for the brothers who made millions as owners of the Akron Beacon Journal, Miami Herald and other big American newspapers. In the beginning, it paid for good works in Knight towns. Later, it focused on promoting quality journalism.

But somewhere along the line, the foundation decided that the newspaper as we know it is a dodo. The eggheads running the show decided they should be spending money not to improve newspapers, but to replace them, or as one statement puts it, not to save journalistic institutions, but to invent them.

In other words, the foundation would use the Knight brothers' money to buy the shovels with which to bury the newspaper industry.

For several years now, the foundation has poured money into projects such as "hyperlocal" websites designed to serve a community as newspapers serve a community, but without all that messy ink and dead trees.

Almost anyone who wanted to launch a community-oriented website could write up an application, it seemed, and get a grant. The fact that these sites seldom make money or connect to a town the way a newspaper does did not phase the Knight bunch, who have written off the newspaper as passe.

Some of these sites, in fact, compete with and take money away from established newspapers, perhaps hastening their decline. The problems with this approach are legion, starting with the obvious fact that newspapers are not now, and never have been, dead. But you'd face a tough sell getting a grant from the Knight fund for a paper product.

There are 8,000 to 9,000 newspapers in this country — no one knows for sure — and fewer than 1,500 are daily newspapers. The rest are



Steve Haynes

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weeklies that serve a single suburb or small town, or some other type of community. Many have websites, though few of them make money. Print newspapers, however, make money.

And of the daily newspapers, maybe only 150 to 200 are metro dailies, the kind the Knights owned and the kind that really are in trouble today. It's not that many won't survive, but they face a need to change and reconnect to a single definable community that is difficult at best.

Most, like *The Kansas City Star* or *The Denver Post*, started out serving a single town and grew to dominate a region. After World War II, though, American cities changed. So did America's sense of community. Metro newspapers have been trying to figure all this out for 60 years, but now, faced with a poor economy and increased competition, many must change in ways they never dreamed of.

Does the same fate await the rest of the industry, the 7,000, 8,000 newspapers that make money and still connect to a community? Probably not. Most are profitable and vital businesses, it's just that you never hear much about these smaller papers. The big ones get all the ink on the financial pages, mostly because they are owned by public companies.

The Knight Foundation has little if any appreciation for this aspect of the business, however. It's too busy buying shovels. The latest outrage is something called the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, founded in conjunction with the Aspen Institute.

This commission worries greatly about rein-

venting journalism and ignores the fact that, in most places, and especially in rural America, it thrives. That does not fit its grand scheme of new, shiny electronic journalism. The commission, in its report, talks a lot about the need to reconnect America the way Lincoln connected us with rails (by subsidizing the robber barons) and Eisenhower connected us with freeways (killing and maiming thousands of small rural communities in the process.)

It repeats the false assumptions that rural areas are not served by broadband Internet access (in fact, unserved areas are shrinking as wireless and satellite providers boost their presence) and that many in urban America lack broadband because they cannot pay for it. (In fact, many simply choose not to connect or use less expensive dial-up because their needs are small.)

By this time, you'd think the Knight brothers would be twirling in the grave, but their latter-day minions stand ready to heap even more earth on the newspaper's grave.

But to paraphrase Mark Twain, the rumors of our demise are greatly exaggerated. We need to grow and change with the new world, but the evidence is no electronic means exists to replace us. (And that is a fact confirmed by years and years of Knight company research.)

Our advice to the Knight Foundation and its commission: Belay the shovels. Instead of throwing money at ways to reinvent journalism, help the industry meet its challenges in a way that will help existing and new publishers prosper.

For since there is nothing out there to replace newspaper journalism in our society, it stands to reason that democracy will depend on us — and our heirs — for a long time to come.

On the web: [report.knightcomm.org](http://report.knightcomm.org)

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### Budgeting process ripe for change

House Appropriations committee hearings held the end of September served as a window on the state of Kansas government finances. Current dire conditions may be the catalyst for major changes in the state's budgeting process.

Tax receipts for the first quarter of fiscal year 2010 are down \$166.7 million, or 12.1 percent, compared to last year.

The public school system will likely be at least \$54 million short of what its administrators say is needed.

The Kansas Public Employee Retirement System is so underfunded that it is unlikely to meet future obligations without significant changes.

Although the state Capitol restoration has improved the appearance and capacity of the building, the project is significantly over budget and behind schedule.

Testimony by Secretary of Commerce Dave Kerr offered some hope for job growth. Even though the state lost 49,000 jobs from August 2008 to August 2009, Kansas continues to attract new businesses.

Committee chairman Kevin Yoder (R-Overland Park) had some pointed questions for Kerr on efforts to land a deal with Cerner Laborato-

### Other Opinions

• Paul Soutar  
Flint Hills Center

ries to bring 4,500 medical technology jobs to Wyandotte County. The hoped-for pact would include an office building, a soccer complex including 28 fields for regional tournaments and an 18,000-seat stadium that could serve as the home field for the Kansas City Wizards major league soccer franchise.

Yoder and Vice Chairman Jason Watkins (R-Wichita) are leading the committee toward major changes they believe will address both short- and long-term budgeting problems.

The committee invited Arturo Perez of the National Conference of State Legislatures to explain how other state legislatures write budgets independent of the governor.

Watkins introduced a bill to move toward performance-based budgeting. The bill would likely replace HB 2273, which calls for a zero-based budget process Watkins believes

would be too difficult to implement. He also introduced a bill to create a "sunset commission" to evaluate the need each and every state agency.

Paul Soutar is an investigative reporter for the Wichita-based Flint Hills Center for Public Policy. The center is an independent think tank that provides research and initiates reform in education, fiscal policy, and health care, and is dedicated to limited government, open markets, and personal responsibility.

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### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

