Editorial: Social media firms put business before free speech

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Dec. 25, 2014, New York Times.***

Dissidents in Russia and elsewhere are upset that Facebook has blocked an event page for a demonstration to support a leading opposition figure at the behest of the government of President Vladimir Putin. While their outrage is understandable, Facebook's decision serves as an important reminder that social media companies are under no obligation to support free speech if doing so would harm their business.

Facebook officials have declined to address publicly their decision to remove the page for the Jan. 15 event for Aleksei Navalny, a vocal critic of Putin; the page is still available outside of Russia. But the company says that it will restrict content in countries when a government asks it to do so if it determines that the information violates local laws.

Data from Facebook show that it has increasingly blocked content in response to government requests. For example, in the first six months of 2014, it removed content in Russia 29 times, up from four times in the last six months of 2013. The increase on removals was even more stunning in Pakistan — 1,773 times in the first half of this year, up from just 162 times in the previous six months.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Impossible to be colorblind

By Larry Weitzman

All the colors are taken 1903 was a remarkable year. Not only did the first powered flight by a human take place by the Wright Brothers, but our country was introduced to the Crayola. Crayola became one of those marketing miracle words like Kleenex, Thermos, and Frigidaire in which a brand name was used to describe a product. In elementary school it was the lucky student who had the Crayola box with 64 crayon colors. I was lucky to have eight or 16.

Even Crayola has suffered from political correctness in naming its colors like Prussian Blue in 1958 became Midnight Blue, Flesh was renamed Peach in 1962, in 1999 Indian Red became Chestnut, although that color got its name from a reddish brown pigment found in India. Even Chartreuse became Laser Lemon in 1990.



Larry Weitzman

While Crayola has 120 colors in its palette, like Electric Lime, Fuzzy Wuzzy, or Outer Space with all colors being defined by their approximate Red Green Blue components, only two of their colors (pigments) are pure, Black and White with Black having a component base of 0,0,0 RGB and White listed as 255, 255, 255 component parts of RGB.

Perhaps it should be explained that all colors are made from some combination of the primary colors Red, Green, Blue. White is equal parts of RGB and Black is no light whatsoever (hence 0,0,0). What is sometimes taken for granted is how much we use color to describing things, especially humans or in politics, so much so that there are practically no basic colors left including a combination such as the use of the term Rainbow (Coalition).

If you are of the left side of political persuasion, you are Red or a Pinko. If you are from Africa, you are Black although there are Blacks who are not from Africa but still identifying as an African American. Sometimes Hispanics from Latin America are referred to as Browns (Brown Power). During World War II the term Yellow was used to describe a component of the Axis power.

If you are an environmentalist, you are Green. If you are a Republican or from a Republican state you could be thought of as from a Red state as they were described by mainstream media in the 2000 presidential election, a description that has stuck until this day.

It is most interesting that the late Tim Russert, who is credited for the current red/blue state designation, did not call the Red states as Democrat leaning states and the Blue states as Republican leaning states. (Republicans are kind of thought as cold and heartless by their adversaries.) That designation would certainly have been more fitting and descriptive, but maybe not politically correct. Who wants to be labeled a Red, especially if you are one.

In 1908, a newspaper published a map with the red state/blue designation in the same manner as Russert. In 1976, the designation was reversed (red-Democrat; blue-Republican) and held that way until 2000.

So with the regard to the eight or so basic colors, White,

Black, Red, Blue, Green, Gray (senior citizens), Yellow, Brown, Purple (a color used as to support men's gay rights and Black women) and Pink (also used to identify women's issues like breast cancer) there appears to be only one color yet unclaimed politically and that is Orange. While Orange is the name for one of nature's great foods (lots of vitamin C and fiber), no one has used it politically. Perhaps it should be identified with men's issues like prostate cancer. It is currently one of the colors for the Denver Broncos, Chicago Bears, Cincinnati Bengals, Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Miami Dolphins (there goes the alliteration) and it is the color for Syracuse University (Syracuse mascot is Otto the Orange and they are called the Orangemen).

After Orange, political groups will have to dig deep. Maybe the next political color will be Mango Tango, Bittersweet, Cornflower, Inchworm or Neon Carrot.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Editorial: Immigrant driver's license policy makes sense

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Dec. 26, 2014, Los Angeles Times.***

Beginning Jan. 1, immigrants who are here illegally will be able to take another small step out of the shadows by applying for California driver's licenses.

It took years to enact this controversial policy, but ultimately granting licenses to qualified drivers, regardless of their legal status, is the right thing to do. Why? Because,

as nine other states and the District of Columbia have figured out, ensuring public safety on the roadways is more important than punishing people for being in the country illegally.

As spelled out in AB 60, which was passed by the state Legislature and signed into law last year, applicants will have to clear reasonable hurdles. They must provide proof of identity (the accepted credentials, such as passports and birth certificates, vary by native country) and proof of California residency. They must then meet the same criteria as everyone else: Pass a written exam on the rules of the road, a vision test and a road test.

At the insistence of the Department of Homeland Security, each license will note that it is “not acceptable for federal purposes” and “does not establish eligibility for employment, voter registration, or public benefits.” Nor can the licenses be used to clear security checks at airports.

Read the whole story

Editorial: Repeal of life sentences for minors should be retroactive

Publisher’s note: ***This editorial is from the Dec. 19, 2014, Los Angeles Times.***

The Supreme Court made the right call two years ago when it found unconstitutional state laws mandating a life sentence without parole for minors convicted of grievous crimes. But in that decision, Miller vs. Alabama, the court left unresolved a

crucial detail: Did the decision apply only to future cases, or did it extend to minors already serving life sentences? The court now has a chance to answer that question and to complete this important act of justice and decency by making the ruling retroactive.

The current case involves George Toca of Louisiana, who had just turned 17 in 1984 when, police said, he accidentally shot and killed an accomplice during a robbery. Toca maintains that someone else killed his friend (the Innocence Project has taken on the case), but that's not the key issue in the appeal. After 30 years behind bars, Toca argues that he's a different person than the child who was imprisoned in 1985 and that the Miller ruling means he should be able to offer mitigating evidence at a new sentencing hearing. Unsurprisingly, the state of Louisiana disagrees.

The Miller case involved a young man convicted of an even more heinous crime. In 2003, Miller, then 14, and a friend beat a neighbor with a baseball bat, then torched a house trailer with the victim still inside. The Supreme Court previously had recognized that, biologically and psychologically, young minds are not fully formed and, among other things, teens have an underdeveloped sense of responsibility. Given that, the court ruled in Miller that a mandatory sentence of life without parole for minors violated the 8th Amendment's prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment. Sentences in such cases, the court held, must be tailored to the individual circumstances of the crime.

Read the whole story

Opinion: California tax battle looms in ’16

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

When Democrats lost their legislative supermajorities last month, it doomed even the very faint chance that legislators would enact the hefty tax increases liberal groups yearn to impose.



Dan Walters

That, however, doesn’t end the perpetual debate over whether Californians should pay more taxes; it merely shifts it to the ballot, most likely in 2016.

The much higher voter turnout of a presidential election, coupled with a much lower threshold for qualifying initiative ballot measures, creates the opportunity for pro-tax-increase forces – such as public employee unions – to make their big move.

At least four embryonic tax-hike campaigns are evident, with the biggie being whether the temporary increases in sales taxes on everyone and income taxes on the affluent, passed by voters in 2012 at the behest of Gov. Jerry Brown, will be extended.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Giving up Christmas – a new tradition

By Kathryn Reed

I have struggled with Christmas for a number of years. This is the first year I've chosen not to celebrate it. Leading up to this day has been liberating, we'll see if I feel the same way when the day is over.

It's been liberating because there are no decorations, no year-end letter to write, no shopping, no baking. Every day is just another day. And it's a day in Tahoe, so that's pretty darn special already.

I will be working on a story today, ironically, with a bit of a Christmas theme. But working on the holiday is nothing new. That's the hazards of the news business. And personal beliefs must be cast aside when it comes to work.

For many years, Christmas was not celebrated on Dec. 25 in my family because of my schedule or my sister's – she is in the medical profession.

But this will be the first Christmas I have chosen not to be with family.

If memory serves me correctly, I was 30 the first time I didn't spend the holiday with my parents. They went off to see my sister in the Midwest; I was living in Las Vegas. I admit it was hard. A new tradition I wasn't quite ready for.

I'm wondering how my mom and sister are reacting to me not being with them today when originally I said I would be there. A new tradition for them.

My struggles with Christmas are that I’m neither religious, nor do I believe in Santa. So, that leaves me asking the questions – What am I celebrating? And why?

I don’t need Christmas to appreciate my family and friends. I certainly don’t need to be buying presents for them or receiving any to show appreciation or feel appreciated.

I asked my mom, who is religious, years ago about why people give gifts at Christmas. Her answer didn’t satisfy me. If gifts are to be given to someone, why not do so on their birthday – when it’s all about them?

I don’t need Dec. 25 to signify having some special meal. I can do that whenever or on other occasions that I believe are worthy.

I like receiving cards from family and friends – more as a year-end wrap than to wish me a Merry Christmas. I actually like receiving snail mail.

I’m skipping sending out correspondence this year – for reasons that go beyond giving up on Christmas. My plan is for 2016 is to send out new year’s cards; or maybe in 2015 I’ll send something out on my birthday – the start of my personal new year. Whatever I decide, it will be another new tradition.

I still like seeing all the lights on buildings and friends’ houses decorated – even if I don’t truly get the point of it. And the holiday parties are wonderful – who doesn’t like a good party?

What I don’t expect to change is to wish people Happy Holidays, Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah and Happy New Year. Nor am I offended when any of those greetings are said to me. No one means anything mean by expressing good times, good wishes upon someone. I won’t be offended in whatever way they are said to me.

Whatever you are or are not celebrating today or this December, enjoy. And don’t begrudge others their time to celebrate what is important to them on whatever day that may be. And don’t judge those who for whatever reason are not celebrating what you are celebrating.

Letter: Camp Rich takes a turn at B&B

To the community,

Camp Richardson Historic Resort & Marina was the Adopt A Day of Nourishment sponsor for the Mexican themed dinner that was prepared by the Bread & Broth cooks and volunteers on Dec. 15. Camp Richardson’s generous $250 donation fed 120 dinner guests a nutritious, well-balanced meal and helped cover the costs of fruits and vegetables that were added to the food donations made by local stores for the weekly giveaway bags.

The upbeat and friendly crew from Camp Richardson helped bag the giveaways and man the serving line and dessert table.

Mai Dalton, lodging operations manager, remarked that, “Camp Rich wants to give back to our community when we can. Its feels so good to help the less fortunate, especially during the holiday season.”

Also volunteering from Camp Richardson were Larry Pedigo, IT supervisor and his son, Anthony; Travis Lauinger, Round Hill Pines Resort and Sports Center manager; and Charlie Gaspar, front desk manager.

Bread & Broth is committed to easing hunger in the Lake Tahoe

South Shore community and with the generous support of our sponsors and donors, has been providing dinners to all who attend enter our doors for over 25 years. B&B would like to extend our gratitude to Camp Richardson Historic Resort & Marina for their two sponsorships which fed over 200 folks this year and being a part of the “solution” to ease hunger.

To help B&B as a donor or sponsor, contact at 530.542.2876 or carolsgerard@aol.com.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: The woman’s heart attack

By Martha Weinman Lear, New York Times

In medical circles, they call it the Hollywood Heart Attack. You’ve seen it: grimace of agony, clutching of chest, sudden collapse, the whole purple-prose panoply.

For my husband, Harold Lear, a doctor who became a patient just that suddenly, it was the first stop in a five-year medical odyssey, one cardiac crisis after another, ending with the ultimate stop in 1978.

Through all the years that followed, it remained my assumption that the Hollywood Heart Attack was it: the paradigm, the norm, the way heart attacks are supposed to happen.

I was relieved of this assumption two years ago, when I had one of my own.

Mine went like this: altogether well one moment, vaguely unwell the next; fluttery sensation at the sternum, rising into the throat; mild chest pressure; then chills, sudden nausea, vomiting, some diarrhea. No high drama, just a mixed bag of somethings that added up to nothing you could name. Maybe flu, maybe a bad mussel, maybe too much wine, but the chest pressure caused me to say to my second husband, “Could this be a heart attack?” “Of course not,” he said. “It’s a stomach bug.”

Read the whole story

Letter: A productive year at Barton Health

To the community,

It has been a productive and noteworthy year at Barton Health. At times, the future seemed uncertain with the unpredictable roll out of the Affordable Care Act and the lighter winter season. Fortunately, we have persevered and several noteworthy accomplishments stand out.



John Williams

A few 2014 achievements at Barton include:

- Increasing healthcare access to uninsured and underinsured community members through the Barton Community Health Center.
- Being recognized as a “Top Performer” for key quality measures by the Joint Commission
- Heightening the patient experience to new levels by expanding and adding improvement measures.
- Investing in our workforce by bringing exceptional people into the organization, including new leaders, staff members, and physicians.
- Expanding access to care by providing urology services for men, women, and children.
- Volunteering our medical services at community events and helping those in need.

All of this would not be possible without the efforts of our employees and their dedication to providing high quality care for our community. We appreciate their hard work and look forward to another successful year in 2015.

May you and your families have a happy and healthy holiday season.

Sincerely,

John Williams, Barton Health CEO

Letter: Thanks for replacing stolen toys

To the community,

Thank you to everyone in the Community Development Agency who contributed to the Toys for Tots collection after hearing

about the sad news of the toys being stolen.

In an amazing show of holiday spirit and in a matter of only a few hours CDA was able to collect $400 to purchase replacement gifts for children of all ages.

Special thanks to Walmart for giving us a 10 percent discount after hearing about the stolen toys. We were about to get baby toys, frozen dolls, a basketball, football, and soccer ball, a remote control quad, a couple crafting kits and so much more. The toys will be making their way to Tahoe.

Great show of generosity CDA.

Julie R. Curry, CDA administrative technician