

Opinion: Will a free press survive?

By Kathryn Reed

Does news matter? *Yes.*

Do the media matter? *Depends who you ask.*

Does where you get your news from matter? *Depends who you ask.*

Do people still care about unbiased news? *Not as much as they once did.*

Today is World Press Freedom Day. The UN General Assembly designated May 3 as such in 1993. Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right as stated in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

In the United States we have had such freedoms since 1787 when the Constitution was signed. The First Amendment says, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

Not a week goes by that someone tells me I should take down the comments section on *Lake Tahoe News*. It's because they don't like the tone of the comments, they don't like the

meanness, they disagree with what is being said, and they don't like the anonymity.

Too bad, they are staying.

I agree, though, the anger, the meanness, the name-calling, the childish behavior – it's all horrible.

But I tell people a few things. First, stop reading the comments if they are so offended by them. Second, there is no way to know someone is really Jane Doe. People contend Facebook is a way of getting people to use their real name, but people use fake names there, too. And using a third party like FB is a bad way of doing business. Third, my guess is 98 percent of the people believe what they are writing, while the other 2 percent just want to stir the pot. Read the message and not the tone. I believe people are angry, they are disgruntled and they want to be heard. Maybe we should be exploring why there is such venom out there instead of trying to quash it. Real name or not, this is still their belief. Fourth, some people because of their job need to use a different name.

I think some people in the Lake Tahoe Basin are afraid of the truth. They don't want it in a news story, an opinion piece or a comment. Most of all, they don't want it in black and white for the entire world to see. (*LTN* is read in more than 100 countries, and more than 3,000 cities.)

Lake Tahoe News is here to publish the truth. We don't believe there is good or bad news, positive or

2013 in figures

- 71 journalists killed
- 826 journalists arrested
- 2,160 journalists threatened or physically attacked
- 87 journalists kidnapped
- 77 journalists who fled their country
- 6 media assistants killed
- 39 netizens and citizen-journalists

negative news – there is just news.

News is like people. It comes in different shapes, sizes, colors, warts and all. It can be elegant, ugly, hard to look at and pleasing. It can be fun, entertaining, enlightening and educational. It can be mundane and boring. It can change your life – just like people can.

killed

- 127 bloggers and netizens arrested

Source: *Reporters Without Borders*

People have more choices of where they get their news today. They can get it from nearly every spectrum of the political wheel. They can get just headlines. Internet sites will filter news based on a person's interests.

I worry that the plethora of news/information that is available today is actually making us a society that is less informed. We can't take everything in.

We used to rely on newspaper and broadcast editors to filter out the unimportant from the important. Now there is so much information available every day it would be impossible to read or listen to all of it in a 24-hour period.

We know a lot more, at least superficially, while at the same time we know a lot less on a deeper level.

It's hard to absorb things when we are on constant overload.

And then I wonder if some people even pay attention to what is going on.

The individual has always been responsible for needing to gather her own information. We in the media cannot spoon-feed you. Ignorance, while it's a choice, is not a viable excuse

for not knowing what is going on.

It is up to you where you get your news.

And people want their news for free. That worries me beyond the fact it can be a struggle to pay my bills. Philosophically it worries me because news organizations are continuing to make cutbacks. People, like in most professions, are the No. 1 expense of media companies. But if reporters and editors are let go, then who will provide the news? Where will our news come from in the next 10 years? Who will you trust to provide it to you? Would you even notice if *Lake Tahoe News* went away?

Whether the news is online or in print, it takes the same amount of resources to create the story. The difference between print vs. online is the printing costs; but rest assured there are expenses related to an online news site.

Bringing people the news is not an easy job. It can even be a deadly one. In 2013, 71 journalists were killed.

It's certainly not a way to get rich.

Journalists have always been considered bottom feeders, right up there with lawyers and used car salesman.

We do it because we have a love for the truth. We want to hold people accountable. We want to tell your story, as well as the stories people don't necessarily want told but the public has a right to know.

It's a job that never ends. There's job security in that. But only if people are reading and willing to financially support their news source(s) of choice via cash as well as by supporting the advertisers.

World Press Freedom Day will not matter if the press no longer exists. Our existence, though, in many ways is out of our

hands. It's up to you – the reader.

Letter: City uses misleading words about parking

To the community,

Words, they bring people together, they drive people apart. We use words to inform. We use words to misinform. My friend says, "Information is a lot like water; it's hard to hold on to, and hard to keep from leaking away." Often language is misused to create complexities, to mislead, to hide the truth or facts. Michael Lewis calls it the art of torturing data.



Bill Crawford

Too often in politics there is disinformation, which is the deliberate use of incorrect and misleading information. Disinformation can become an art form by creating propaganda to control public opinion and behavior, telling a lie time and time again. Sometimes it's called advertising. Sometimes it's

called public relations.

In local politics it's called the financial need for city parking meters. City government has built an argument for parking meters using numbers that are hypothetical and projecting assumptions and suppositions as facts. Justice Oliver W. Holmes said, "You can build a syllogism for any conclusion." And that's what the City Council and city manager have done to sell parking meters. The argument is suspicious. The numbers are deceptively attractive, but have been shown by Tahoe-4-Tahoe to be fallacious. Mistrust is the result. And trust, like water, is hard to hold and hard to keep because false in one, false in all.

Language is the heart of the matter. And when abused there's a price to pay. Always.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

Letter: County assessor has crossed the line

To the community,

The long arm of our El Dorado County assessor is now reaching inside the walls of our vacation homes. A tax on personal furnishings? This takes our breath away.

What a "wonderful" way to discourage purchasing or upgrading our vacation property. They want purchase prices on furniture, stoves, refrigerators and supplies. Does that mean silverware, dishes, can openers, blankets, toasters? All this going back to 2003 and prior.

My reaction to this letter from our El Dorado tax assessor is:
“You have got to be kidding!”

I am a retired letter carrier and my wife is a retired waitress. Maintaining our modest vacation home is a struggle with advertising (VRBO), management fees, property taxes, HOA dues, utility bills, South Lake Tahoe permit fees, South Lake Tahoe rental/TOT taxes, insurance, and repairs.

We received our notice with a deadline date of April 1 on March 29 – three days before the due date. How wonderful of them to give us a five-week “extension” to reply.

They have opened up a “can of worms” by asking for purchasing histories going back earlier than 2003. I no longer have purchase receipts going back farther than five years. Much of our home inventory are second-hand items we bring up after use in our primary home.

Are other counties around Lake Tahoe part of this new regulation? If that is not the case, this is both unfair and unethical.

Greg and Penny Ripke, South Lake Tahoe

Letter: Cutting off lake access a bad precedent

To the community,

The story of the Somers Loop Right of Way trail begins with a generous offer, but could end with the local residents and other public losing a well-known trail to the lake.

Nevada Pacific Development Corporation (NPDC) is proposing to donate to the public 16 acres comprising acreage surrounding the Incline Flume/Bullwheel as a trade-off for a long-standing trail to a Crystal Bay beach. This is a generous offer by the owner. But the proposed abandonment and reversion to NPDC of a portion of the Somers Loop Road and the public access trail easement to Lake Tahoe adjacent to NPDC's lakefront properties violates the public's right to use this old trail to the beautiful sandy cove.

While it is exciting that Nevada Pacific Development will donate their other 16 acres, what they propose is a trade-off that results in the loss of public lake access. Tradeoffs are always difficult, but lake access is so limited on the North Shore that existing access to coves and beaches must take precedence.

1. LOSS OF PUBLIC LAKE ACCESS – Public access to the lake in Crystal Bay is limited today; losing one of the area's few access points to Lake Tahoe does substantial harm to the public.

2. LAKE ACCESS/ROW IS PRICELESS – The value of the public right of way and a public access to the lake is a gift that cannot be rejected.

a. The Somers Loop Right of Way is currently used by the public and has been for years.

b. The proposed lake easement can also be accessed from the water.

c. Improving the access route would mitigate runoff and improve accessibility.

3. DANGEROUS PRECEDENT – The proposed abandonment creates a dangerous precedent for the elimination of future public rights of way and lake access easements at Tahoe.

4. PROCESS MUST BE TRANSPARENT –

a. This abandonment process requires an application, a public hearing by both Washoe County and TRPA, and notice to neighbors. County commissioner approval alone is inadequate, as public access to the lake is a TRPA priority and must be heard by the Governing Board.

b. Washoe County has once before required a former owner of this property to submit an abandonment application for the same trail.

c. The application process was never followed.

Laurel Ames, conservation chair Tahoe Area Sierra Club Group

Letter: Libraries make people smarter

To the community,

When I visit small towns with active libraries in a white suit as Mark Twain, they hail me as “Mr. Twain,” or “Samuel Clemens.” When I visit small towns without active libraries they customarily ask if I’m there to fry them up some chicken.

Please vote yes on Measure L.

McAvoy Layne, Incline Village

Editorial: Smart phones and the 4th Amendment

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the April 27, 2014, New York Times.*

More than 90 percent of American adults own a mobile phone, and more than half of the devices are smartphones. But "smartphone" is a misnomer. They are personal computers that happen to include a phone function, and like any computer they can store or wirelessly retrieve enormous amounts of personal information: emails, photos and videos; document files; financial and medical records; and virtually everywhere a person has been.

On Tuesday, the Supreme Court will consider whether law enforcement officers during an arrest may search the contents of a person's mobile phone without a warrant. The court should recognize that new technologies do not alter basic Fourth Amendment principles, and should require a judicial warrant in such circumstances.

The court is considering the issue in two separate cases. In one, Boston police officers arrested a man on drug charges and seized his flip phone. After seeing an incoming call on the phone's outer screen, they opened the phone and checked the call log, which led them to an apartment where they found drugs, money and firearms.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Calif. not treating taxpayers fairly

By George Runner

Did you know that if the California takes your money in the form of an illegal tax or fee, you might not be able to get it back?

I was outraged when I first learned if a taxpayer pays a tax or fee that is later found to be unconstitutional or illegal in court, the government does not necessarily have to refund their money.



George Runner

Currently, taxpayers are only eligible to receive refunds if they have exhausted all of their “administrative appeals remedies,” even if the tax they paid is later declared illegal or unconstitutional.

In order for taxpayers to exhaust their “administrative appeals remedies” they must file a timely refund claim with the proper agency. The time period to file a refund claim is different for each tax and fee program, ranging anywhere from 30 days to several years.

That’s right; your state government will keep any and all money it illegally took from you, unless you have already jumped through several confusing administrative hoops – even

hoops that you were never aware of.

That's why this legislative session, I am proud to sponsor legislation to change this situation by extending important, common-sense protections to taxpayers. Two identical measures, AB2510 and SB1327, would require the state to provide a full refund to all individuals who paid a tax later declared unconstitutional or illegal.

These bills would require the state to automatically issue refunds to taxpayers who were illegally taxed. It would also open up an additional appeals period of one year after a state tax is declared unconstitutional, giving taxpayers a chance to apply for the refunds they deserve.

Our legislation would apply to state taxes and fees paid by both businesses and individuals, and would affect people all across California.

For example, these bills would apply to the controversial fire prevention fee, paid by nearly 800,000 rural homeowners every year. Even if the class action lawsuit currently challenging the fire fee is successful, only taxpayers who filed appeals within 30 days of the date on their bills would be eligible for refunds. Under SB1327 and AB2510, every fire fee payer would receive a refund.

Businesses and large taxpayers would also benefit from these bills becoming law. For example, a number of years ago the Board of Equalization overstated the property values of a number of power plants. One of the plants, Elk Hills Power, sued the BOE and eventually won, resulting in a partial refund of the taxes it paid. However, several other plants were deemed ineligible to receive a refund because they did not protest the original assessment.

In my opinion, this is just wrong.

According to SB1327 author state Sen. Steve Knight: "When

government makes a mistake, they need to do the right thing. This bill would return illegally collected taxes to the taxpayers... it's just common sense."

Assemblyman Donald Wagner, author of AB2510, adds: "When California taxpayers have been illegally forced to pay a tax, it should not be their responsibility to fill out paperwork that they may or may not know exists, in order to recoup this money. The State needs to reimburse the taxpayers as quickly and painlessly as possible – it is not our money."

It is criminal that California can keep money it illegally collects from its citizens. Anyone who in good faith pays what ends up being an illegal tax should get their money back. It's as simple as that.

George Runner represents more than 9 million Californians as a taxpayer advocate and elected member of the state Board of Equalization.

Letter: Gypsy looking to return to the stage



To the community,

Gypsy became a household name in the 1980s after being

discovered at La Cage Aux Folles cabaret in Beverly Hills. He was discovered by Mel Brooks.

His fame in Lake Tahoe came 20 years later in February 2000, when James "Gypsy" Haake opened Carnival Cabaret in Lake Tahoe at the Horizon Casino Resort.

Gypsy, as most friends and fans know her, starred in that show for four years. The show became the longest running show in the history of Lake Tahoe. It was so popular, the Horizon Casino management asked for it to return in September 2008. It ran for another three years until January 2011.

After his fourth retirement from stage, Gypsy is ready to return to work at 82. Along with several partners, he is raising capital to open his own showroom in Palm Springs. Currently, he has raised money from a private donor, however, he is currently crowd funding to raise additional money.

We need your support. You can visit Gypsy on his Facebook page or by going to this website to donate.

Any donation is acceptable, this is a crowd funding scenario, the larger the crowds, the less your donation can be.

Help put this actor and amazing performer back to work in his final request, to star in a showroom named after him.

I was 19 years old when I met gypsy and now I am 45, and he is 82 still wearing stilettos, and healthy, plus extremely active.

Dan Gore, Carnival Cabaret producer

Letter: Heavenly ski patrol comes to B&B's rescue

To the community,

Heavenly ski patrol's "all in with high energy" motto was clearly demonstrated at the April 21 Adopt A Day of Nourishment sponsorship dinner.

Ski patrol volunteers Adrian Brown, Audrey Bayless, Rick Rogers, Colton Terry and Rick McGuire enthusiastically jumped right into sorting and filling the 70 "to go bags", moved on to serving 98 dinner guests, and stayed to help clean up the kitchen and put away the tables and chairs.

Heavenly ski patrol's donation of funds and time made it possible for B&B to provide the evening's full course meal which has been occurring every Monday at St. Theresa Church's Grace Hall for over 24 years. Also with the help of our many donors, B&B began serving soup and pasta meals five years ago this month, at the Lake Tahoe Community Presbyterian Church.

B&B would like to express our appreciation to Heavenly's ski patrol members for their generous \$250 donation and sending a great volunteer crew who brought a lot of fun, energy and good will to evening's dinner.

Speaking for the ski patrol, Bayless wrote, "HSP values community outreach. It was a wonderful experience to volunteer and give back."

Thank you Heavenly Ski Patrol.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Letter: Crystal Bay deserves better lake access

To the community,

Recently an issue has arisen in our neighborhood that deserves to see the light of day.

Indeed, to prevent such an event taking place behind closed doors again I propose the following:

Master Plan Update Proposal: I propose the Crystal Bay-Incline Village Master Plan include language that identifies, protects, preserves and prioritizes the opening of all the community's vertical public access ways to Lake Tahoe. A vertical access way provides access from the nearest public roadway to the shoreline. When improved and opened access ways are extremely important because they provide a new way for the public to get to the lake which is extremely valuable in areas with limited or inadequate access.

The issue: Unbeknownst to any members of our Crystal Bay community Washoe County has been preparing a land trade of great value to our neighborhood and our Crystal Bay community without any public notification.

It only came to our attention because an individual overheard the conversation of a Washoe County commissioner discussing the matter: the proposed trade of a public lake access way on Somers Loop in Crystal Bay for a parcel of land with no lake access on the old Ponderosa Ranch in Incline Village.

Public Loss – Private Gain: The trade of the Crystal Bay public access way to the lake would result in a remarkable

increase in the market value of a single private landholding. It would substantially decrease the market value of the surrounding Crystal Bay property and the Crystal Bay community.

Crystal Bay Public Access Issue: Crystal Bay is not allowed on Incline Village beaches. Crystal Bay has inadequate public access to the lake.

Every public access way to the lake is of great value to the present and future residents of our community. The Master Plan Update should identify all public access ways and provide language that protects, preserves and prioritizes the opening of all the community's vertical public access ways.

Bad Precedent: Hundreds of millions of public tax dollars have been invested in Lake Tahoe to preserve it in it's pristine beauty for future generations.

Millions of tax dollars have been invested acquiring public access to the lake for the benefit of all. Millions of dollars have been invested in Lake Tahoe to prevent private development from closing off the lake to the public. Trading of public lake access ways for land with no lake access and that results in huge private benefit is a bad precedent and a misuse of the public trust. Therefore, I propose the Identification, Protection and Opening of all Vertical Public Accessways to Lake Tahoe in the Master Plan update for Incline Village-Crystal Bay. Additionally, I ask all residents of Incline Village, Crystal Bay and Washoe County to email or call Washoe County Commissioner Marsha Berkbighler (mberkbighler@washoecounty.us) and let her know you do not support her proposal to trade the public lake access way in Crystal Bay for mountain land with no lake access.

Margaret Eadington, Crystal Bay