Opinion: Free online news era fading away

By Howard Kurtz

It’s time to pay up, America.

The era of free news is rapidly coming to a close.

The *Washington Post*, one of the last holdouts among major newspapers, will probably begin charging for online access next year. And the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Philadelphia Daily News* announced this month that they will launch separate paywall sites early next year.

We’re all spoiled by the illusion that we can get whatever we want on the interwebs without having to pay a dime. Fire up the Google, troll the Twitter, see who’s got the most tantalizing links. We all do it, and we all take it for granted.

But you can’t have a media ecosystem in which everyone is aggregating, summarizing and retweeting content from everyone else. At some point there have to be actual human beings making phone calls and attending events and pawing through public documents.

And these people — known as “reporters” — need to put food on the table. Newspapers and magazines are partially to blame for this state of affairs. For many years they gave away their wares to anyone with a modem, anxious to avoid being left out of the burgeoning world of online commerce. Readers thought nothing of subscribing to a paper that landed on their doorstep but balked at paying for news on their computer screens and mobile phones.

The result, as we all know, has been widespread carnage in

American newsrooms. Some papers, such as the *Rocky Mountain News* and *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, have folded. Others, such as the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, have cut back to three times a week. The Cleveland Plain Dealer just announced it is slashing a third of its newsroom. Even the *New York Times*, which has made fewer cuts than most papers, said last week that 30 jobs will be lost to buyouts.

There were several rounds of buyouts when I worked at the *Washington Post*, where the newsroom has shrunk significantly and the new editor, Marty Baron, warns that more cuts are in store. In an overdue move, the paper now says it will likely move to a metered paywall, charging readers after they get a certain number of free articles each month. The *Times* was among the pioneers of this movement in March 2011 and now has nearly 600,000 digital subscribers. It also helps to have an affluent expense-account crowd, which is why the *Wall Street Journal's* pay site has always thrived.

The *Post* has a unique problem in that it is a national brand online, but a local newspaper in terms of circulation. So the out-of-towners who might want to read political analysis by Dan Balz and Chris Cillizza don't have the option of subscribing to the ink-on-paper version. Yet the lucrative print ads that reach consumers in D.C., Maryland and Virginia are worth far more than the modest rates that can be charged for digital ads. So the paper badly needs another source of revenue.

The *Daily Beast*, where I work, is also considering a metered paywall, now that the parent company is folding the print edition of *Newsweek*, which led to substantial layoffs.

Of course, readers have no august responsibility to pay for anything. And Big Media got too fat and happy in the days of easy money. The Google era is all about disaggregation – that is, you can search for only the information you want about Medicare or Meryl Streep or Miami without the packaging of a

publication. You can get your fix from Facebook friends. With new apps you can be your own editor, selecting the stories that suit your needs.

So this is not a plea for charitable support. Increasingly, the name of the game online is providing something that is so unique or compelling that readers feel it's worth reaching for their credit card.

But it is a reminder that we are hollowing out the business of newsgathering. This is a particular problem at the local level, where no one else is going to investigate decaying schools or the mayor steering contracts to his cronies. Sadly, the shriveled staffs of many local papers are less able to do this kind of distinctive reporting, and will have a hard time persuading readers to pay for meager coverage with an overlay of local sports.

It's also true that there is less original reporting nationally on the environment, health care, criminal justice, finance and other vital areas. The *Washington Post*, where I was once New York bureau chief, has shut down its bureaus around the country.

The slow stampede toward paywalls will prompt a shakeout in which some publications survive by proving their worth and others head for the graveyard. Some early signs are discouraging: Rupert Murdoch's iPad magazine the *Daily*, which never had a clear identity, folded this month, and Arianna Huffington's hugely successful site couldn't get people to pay a modest fee for a monthly digital magazine.

Hey, if folks don't think a paper or magazine or online venture is worth the weekly equivalent of a frappuccino, that's their choice. But man does not live by buzz alone. In the end, we get the journalism we deserve.

Howard Kurtz is the host of CNN's "Reliable Sources" and is Newsweek's Washington bureau chief. He is also a contributor

to the website Daily Download.

Opinion: Regional Plan is all about protecting Lake Tahoe

By Joanne Marchetta

The Tahoe Basin took a big step forward on 12.12.12 when the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency approved the Lake Tahoe Regional Plan. Without this plan, the next quantum leap of environmental gain would be impossible.

The essence of environmental restoration at Tahoe can be boiled down to a simple fact: what happens on the land affects the clarity of the lake's waters. Soft, granular soils allow nutrients, some from over-fertilized lawns, to seep into the lake, spurring algae growth in shoreline areas. Tailpipe emissions, wood smoke and road dust are trapped in the basin by a towering ring of mountain peaks, forcing them down into the water.



Joanne Marchetta

Most important, for more than half a century, most of the fine

sediment that has clouded Lake Tahoe's famously clear water has been continually carried from buildings, driveways, parking lots and roadways by rainstorms and snow melt. Protecting and restoring this fragile ecosystem is the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's central mission and I want to share with you some basic facts about updates to the Lake Tahoe Regional Plan that were recently approved by our board.

Any decent water quality plan for Lake Tahoe—one of only three areas on the West Coast designated an Outstanding National Resource Water—must address the biggest pollutant sources on land. The new Regional Plan is doing that more holistically than ever before by looking at ways to shrink the overall footprint of development in the basin while at the same time recognizing that private property owners have a crucial role to play in reducing the fine sediment coming from their properties.

Under this plan, we will continue push water clarity and environmental quality at Lake Tahoe in the right direction. A key focus of the plan is to help create more walkable, bikeable and attractive town centers to reduce vehicle emissions. Policies also address algae growth and water quality along the lake's shoreline, called the near shore.

The new plan is neither a development nor a growth plan. Some have gotten used to the idea that the only way to ramp up environmental protection is to create new regulations clamp down on visitors, and reduce access to all activity in Tahoe. Lake Tahoe remains one of the most heavily regulated areas in the nation, and TRPA's high standards for all projects, regional caps on building and growth, prohibitions on land subdivisions and requirements to preserve open space are all staying in place. Some rules, like dust control at construction sites, requirements for complete streets and rules on fertilizer use are getting stronger.

But a handful of TRPA's rules have locked bad development in

place and created barriers to simple home improvements or environmentally beneficial redevelopment that are today causing more harm to the lake's cobalt blue waters.

Keep in mind that before many of TRPA's protections were in place, 75 percent of Lake Tahoe's wetlands and 50 percent of its meadows were acquired as private property and built on. The loss of these natural filters must be addressed, but a reliable source of public funding to "buy up" some properties from willing sellers or to pay for environmental improvements at the more than 40,000 residences and businesses in the basin simply cannot form the basis of any realistic restoration plan.

To make meaningful advances in these areas, private property owners need the tools and encouragement to make environmental upgrades and remove existing development from sensitive areas, so the new plan includes incentives that do that. TRPA's targeted enforcement of stormwater infiltration will continue, but the new plan gives small property owners some exemptions for things like garden sheds and new decks when they voluntarily install these measures.

Perhaps the most heartening change to come out of the Regional Plan update process is that usually polarized groups have come together in support of the plan and there is a spirit of cooperation rising up in Lake Tahoe that will provide more forward momentum to repair the lake and our small communities. Despite receiving an unprecedented level of support for the new plan from a broad spectrum of people, there will continue to be some misunderstandings about the plan. The new plan is a water quality restoration plan designed for Lake Tahoe's 21st century problems. I encourage you to contact us with questions and to take a closer look for yourself with the fact sheets available online.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Letter: Thanks to community from TACCD

To the community,

I would like to take this opportunity to send my personal thanks out to those wonderful people who supported our Disability Awareness & Employment Month celebrations and fundraisers.

Restauranteurs Paul and Judy Bruso from Ernie’s, Dan and Tai from Passaretti’s, Kelly from Steamers, Manuel from Taqueria Jalisco, and George from Jalisco Grill, were so generous in their support, providing a day to fund raise in their restaurants.

Sincere thanks also go out to Danny from the Pine Cone Acre Motel, Seth from Raley’s at the Y (for all the food and supplies), Gia and the rest of the gang from KRLT/KOWL, the Tahoe Sierra Kiwanis Aktion Club members, and TACCD Secretary John Pillsbury for their help and support of our huge Treat Street Hot Dog Fundraiser.

Individuals who contributed to our organization’s support also have our heartfelt appreciation: Lloyd and Susan Enos, Paula Foley, B. Gorman, David Jinkins, David Kurtzman, and Liberty Energy.

I am sincerely grateful and look forward to continued support from these long-time backers and any new benefactors who

support our advocacy for senior and disabled residents during the upcoming year.

Most Sincerely,

David Kelly, president TACCD (Tahoe Area Coordinating Council for the Disabled)

Opinion: Institutional investors may bring gunmakers to their knees

By Ken Silverstein, Forbes

The energy and gun worlds are about to collide. Fundamentally, the two have almost nothing in common – except that each has been or is about to be the subject of immense pressures from large institutional investors.

Money managers have long exercised their financial muscle. Energy companies, for example, have been rewarded for developing clean fuels or critical infrastructure. Now, some of those same investment managers are targeting gun manufacturers and particularly those that make semi-automatic weapons.

“The bottom line is neither the California Public Employees’s Retirement System (CalPERS) nor the California Teachers Retirement System (CalSTRS) should have any investments in the makers of guns that are illegal in California, especially those guns that have been used to kill 20 innocent children and six innocent adults,” says California State Treasurer Bill Lockyer.

While those investment managers must serve their shareholders, many would argue that they have a greater purpose – to leverage their strength to achieve common good and to improve lives where they are conducting commerce. The best example is when the masses pressured their institutions to extract money from South Africa's former Apartheid government. Both corporate and scholastic icons responded, which became the impetus that brought down that regime.

Certainly, money managers could use their same influence to effect common-sense changes to gun laws and to penalize those weapons' factories that place their profits ahead of the concerns of the local communities where they co-exist. That's why Lockyer asked the country's two biggest pension funds to examine their allocations in these companies. His request was immediately felt, prompting Cerberus Capital Management to say that it is dumping the Freedom Group that makes one of the firearms used in the Newtown, Connecticut massacre.

"The tragic and devastating acts that took place Dec. 14 at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut have prompted many in this country to call for change: To determine what we can do differently to help ensure the unthinkable never happens again," says a statement by Calstrs. It has $750 million invested in Cerberus.

The flip-side of the argument is that those pension fund managers have a fiduciary obligation to maximize their returns to plan participants – not to make political or social statements. But such thinking is one-dimensional. In the case of Cerberus, it has been reported that its chief executive has relatives in Newtown, meaning that the corporate boss has tied his business to what is now happening in that community.

Indeed, it's about corporate social responsibility – or the idea that the companies and the cities in which they prosper are irrevocably linked. Business reputations have currency and

as such, firms must project a positive image. Public outcry has significance. It's why the National Rifle Association's leadership, which exacts punitive retribution against those who cross it, has released a statement that says it will now try to be more accommodating – at least until legislation starts moving to ban assault-style weapons that can trigger multiple bullets at once.

But the gun lobby gets its fire power from the gun manufacturers. As long as they are flush with cash, so too are its richly-rewarded lobbyists who intimidate those officials on Capitol Hill and in the state legislatures. But now, the actions of the California pension funds are spreading. The Massachusetts treasurer's office is making a similar request of its fund managers. More states are certain to follow, especially if the public anger coalesces into the kind of movement that destroyed Apartheid.

Bottom line: Share prices of the gun makers are taking a direct hit with both Smith & Wesson and Sturm Ruger & Co. going down. They may be able to bully lawmakers and legislators. But they can't threaten the institutional investment managers. Who wants to profit off the misery of others?

"It is apparent that the Sandy Hook tragedy was a watershed event that has raised the national debate on gun control to an unprecedented level," says Cerberus.

Investments with a higher purpose can beat market averages. CalPERS has often said that socially responsible investing has enhanced its returns. Meantime, the International Shareholder Services says that such thinking is a business imperative: Two-thirds of the companies that it surveyed said that good governance is the right thing to do and that such standards also give enterprises a leg up.

Both shareholders and creditors have expressly said that

business must actually live and breathe their corporate codes of conduct. Along those lines, many mainstream investors want to see companies become more “socially responsible” – in essence, to expand their missions beyond serving just shareholders and into the communities where they work.

“With only rare exceptions, the financial community has not sufficiently recognized or rewarded corporate efforts to respond to environmental, labor or human rights challenges, even though such factors can be directly material to corporate performance,” says Marshall Carter, chairman of the New York Stock Exchange Group, in a speech.

While shareholder activism has its cynics, the reality is that businesses must now appeal to a broad range of constituencies. Good corporate citizenship adds value while bucking the mores of a civil society will eventually kill enterprises.

The energy sector knows this firsthand. It has seen the greediest of its members collapse. That’s why the power and gas industry, generally, places a high value on stakeholder communications and community outreach, all with an eye on building consensus. The gun lobby, conversely, has long hidden behind specious arguments, reasoning that it can run roughshod over the people’s will. But now, the institutional investors are the ones packing heat that could drop the gun makers to their knees.

The large pension funds would be justified to leverage their financial clout to effect social change here – to accomplish what elected officials have failed to do, which is to better protect our local communities. And if its good for real people, it’s also healthy for shareholders.

Opinion: What happens when reporters don’t cover news in person?

By Bill Keller, New York Times

In a smart, disheartening piece in the *New York Times* magazine last month, Robert Worth surveyed the frustration of American diplomats who signed up to engage the world – even dreamed of changing it – and now find themselves encumbered by the safeguards and protocols of a risk-averse Washington. It is hard to change the world when you live in a fortress and travel in an armored motorcade.

The article was prompted, of course, by the death of J. Christopher Stevens, the ambassador killed in a Sept. 11 jihadi attack on the American mission in Benghazi, Libya. His death, Worth wrote, “set off a political storm that seems likely to tie the hands of American diplomats around the world for some time to come. Congressmen and Washington pundits accused the administration of concealing the dangers Americans face abroad and of failing Stevens by providing inadequate security. Threats had been ignored, the critics said, seemingly unaware that a background noise of threats is constant at embassies across the greater Middle East.

“The death of an ambassador would not be seen as the occasional price of a noble but risky profession; someone had to be blamed.”

That phrase – “the occasional price of a noble but risky profession” – struck rather close to home. It is a calculus familiar to the tribe of foreign correspondents who work, as Bobby Worth often does, in places that can blow up in your face. If diplomats are withdrawing behind blast walls and armed escorts, and if that is costing us some useful

understanding of the world, is the same thing happening to those who cover the news, and with what consequences?

Like the truly committed diplomat, the truly committed foreign correspondent is something of an endangered species. News organizations began their retreat from the world long ago, driven by economics and a wrongheaded belief that Americans don't care that much about foreign news. The *American Journalism Review*, which began charting the decline of foreign reporting in 1998 (that first article was entitled "Goodbye, World"), reported two years ago that 18 American newspapers and two entire newspaper chains had closed every one of their overseas bureaus. Other news outlets, including most TV networks, have downsized or abandoned full-time bureaus in favor of reporters or anchors who parachute in when there's a crisis. They give us spurts of coverage when an Arab Spring breaks out or Hamas fires rockets into Israel, but much less of the ongoing attention that would equip us to see crises coming and understand them when they erupt.

The *New York Times* and a few other news organizations – NPR, the BBC, *Wall Street Journal*, CNN – have bucked the trend. This is not so much out of altruistic spirit as an awareness that our identity (our brand, to use the obnoxious term of art) promises the world. And, not incidentally, our fastest-growing audience is the world.

But the *Times* is not immune to the dangers that have caused so many diplomats to play safe. My most haunting memories of the eight years I spent as executive editor are phone calls to parents and spouses to say a correspondent had fallen into the hands of bad people, and reckoning with the evacuation of a photographer maimed in the field, and sitting vigil with the families of *Times* employees killed in Kabul and Baghdad. On the 15th floor of the New York Times Building, the meeting rooms are named for *Times* journalists who died pursuing news. We are running out of rooms. The "occasional price of a noble but risky profession" is only a little consolation.

Anthony Shadid was our Chris Stevens: a passionate correspondent, fluent in the language, culture and history, a voracious listener, a beautiful writer. Careful, but impatient to see for himself. Anthony's death earlier this year – after a severe asthma attack while on a surreptitious reporting trip in Syria – was a freakish horror. But following on the kidnapping of four *Times* journalists in Libya and David Rohde's seven-month ordeal in Taliban captivity and other incidents, it prompted the paper to ratchet up already rigorous security, causing some correspondents to worry that an added layer of precaution would mean a little more distance from the truth. That does not seem to have happened yet to any significant degree, as readers can see from recent coverage of places like Gaza and Congo, but correspondents – I checked with half a dozen – are watchful.

"Everything is the balancing act," Alissa Rubin, who travels widely in her coverage of Afghanistan, told me in an e-mail. "I know the paper has gotten a lot more careful and it's a good thing – but only if it doesn't go too far." In Kabul, she said, there are major news organizations that simply do not let reporters venture outside the capital and others that take "stupid crazy risks." The *Times* has long employed security experts in dangerous places, whose mandate is to find the balance between getting the story and getting home safe. To travel with Alissa into the war-wracked countryside is to fully appreciate the meaning of the word "meticulous." Reporting ventures are planned, mapped and timed in exquisite detail, and everyone is alert to signs of potential danger.

In the end, you have to trust trained, experienced correspondents to judge how much risk is too much. And that brings me to the main point. To my mind, the bigger question for our business is not whether we sometimes err on the side of caution, but whether we are hiring, developing and deploying the next generation of trained, experienced correspondents to make those calls. That also happens to be

the best possible investment in security.

Diplomats and journalists serve different masters but both need proximity. Yes, “citizen journalism” has been an asset. YouTube videos from Iran’s 2009 uprising kept the story alive after foreign reporters were expelled, and tweets from Tahrir Square provided real-time guidance to the Arab Spring. But tweets are no substitute for being there.

That’s why Anthony went into Syria, and why some of my colleagues worry that in our response to the very real and increasingly unpredictable perils of that place we could lose a dimension in our reporting. We have local stringers on the ground, and correspondents like C. J. Chivers have produced illuminating stories based on well-planned forays into Syria. But British, European and Arab news outlets are there full time – perhaps foolishly, but it’s possible we miss a layer of an immensely complicated story when we are not.

The price we pay for not being where news happens can be reckoned not only in less good journalism, but in less good policy. Because, make no mistake, some portion of the information governments call “intelligence” is nothing more than an attentive reading of the news.

It is ostensibly a scandal that the Obama administration initially described the attack that killed Chris Stevens not as a terrorist plot but as a protest gone bad. How could the “intelligence community” have gotten it so wrong? How could United Nations Ambassador Susan Rice have gotten it so wrong? Well, go back and read the first online reports after the Benghazi attack.

The *Wall Street Journal*: Stevens was killed “amid angry protests over a film by a U.S. producer that mocks and insults the Prophet Muhammad.”

The *Associated Press*: “… protesters in Libya burned down the U.S. consulate in the Libyan city of Benghazi, killing the

U.S. ambassador. …”

The *Washington Post*: “In both Cairo and Benghazi, protesters said they were demonstrating against a U.S.-released film. …”

CNN: “The Benghazi consulate was one of several American diplomatic missions that faced protests. …”

The *Los Angeles Times*: “Angry crowds attacked U.S. diplomatic posts in Egypt and Libya … after a video appeared on the Internet. …”

The *New York Times*: “Protesters angry over an amateurish American-made video denouncing Islam attacked. …”

It is not irrelevant that every one of the online reports I just cited had a dateline somewhere other than Benghazi — Cairo, Washington, New York. In the ensuing news cycles some excellent reporting by journalists on the scene set the record straight: there were no protesters in the street, but the perpetrators of the attack were, by their own account, infuriated into violence by reports of the offensive video. By then it was too late. The story had been hijacked for partisan spin and counterspin. But I strongly suspect that one reason Susan Rice got it wrong at the outset is that most of us in the press weren’t there.

Letter: Friends improving Pollock Pines library

To the community,

It gives me great pleasure and pride to tell readers about the positive changes we made to the Pollock Pines Library this

year.

Our Pollock Pines Friends chapter has been busy putting donations to work. Our objectives for 2012 were to improve the facility (making the lovely little library as appealing and functional as we could), improve programming, and materials selection, and to increase the

effectiveness of library staff. This year, we upgraded some of the interior furnishings, purchased a laptop for staff use, improved the landscaping, replaced the carpeting (which was nearly 30 years old and getting threadbare), and expanded the kids' area. We also purchased a storage shed for use in storing future book sale books.

The Friends hosted the ever-popular Wild Things Animal Program, which was enthusiastically attended by dozens of children and adults. The Friends also sponsored the Back to School Party with school supplies, ice cream, and cake. In addition, we hosted the Democracy Program with speakers on the Holocaust and Japanese internment, which packed the house.

All of these programs and improvements have been made possible by donations from Friends of the Library and other residents, grants from the Dogwood Garden Club and the Pollock Pines-Camino Rotary, and many enthusiastic hours of volunteer effort. We could not have done this without the support of the community.

In 2013, we plan to make additional minor facility improvements, fund new reading material purchases, and sponsor several children's programs.

We have a cozy and wonderful library in Pollock Pines, with access to the county's collection of over 400,000 books, magazines, videos and audiobooks. Our library has computers for Internet access, WiFi, and a very helpful staff. Through funding from First 5, the Pollock Pines

Library has become a leader in early literacy programs for young children. We’re duly proud of and grateful for our library and its staff of two dedicated librarians.

Much thanks to our Pollock Pines community for its support of the Pollock Pines Library.

Becky McIntyre, Pollock Pines

Letter: Generosity made for memorable event

To the community,

Barton Home Heath & Hospice would like to thank Inn by the Lake, especially Dan Garrison and Rich Bodine, for providing their meeting space for the Light Up a Life ceremony.

Without your kindness, this event would not have been possible.

Also, thank you to everyone in the community that attended and braved the elements for our first outdoor ceremony to take a moment to remember those we have lost.

May the season bring you comfort, joy and peace!

Rebecca Phillipsen, Barton Home Health & Hospice

Letter: Massacres – life imitating art

To the community,

Newton grade school gunfire. A score of children murdered with weapons legal.

Some say life imitates art.

If that’s so, if movies and TV violence are a model that art and weapons legal and weapons illegal flood streets and home, who can stop copycat murder and massacre?

Not cops, not God.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

Letter: Thanks to Lakeside Inn for helping elementary school

To the community,

Zephyr Cove Elementary School would like to thank Lakeside Inn & Casino for donating the turkey to our fourth annual Sharing Feast.

It is businesses like Lakeside that makes this town a special place to live.

Kelly Krolicki, Stateline

Letter: Names of mass murderers should not be published

Publisher's note: ***The following letter is reprinted with permission. A clarification, though, the government does not dictate what names are published. That is up to individual media outlets. There are rules that govern what information law enforcement gives to the media.***

Mr. President, Senators, and Congressman;

In the light of last Friday's tragedy I am writing with a suggestion that might stop at least a fraction of these future events from occurring.

It seems to me that at least some of these heinous acts committed by misguided individuals are motivated by the fact that their names will outlive them in terms of the notoriety accorded them in the media and history.

I am a firm believer in the rights of a free press and would never condone its suppression, but could not the reporting and recording of these tragic events be equally well covered without the inclusion of the perpetrators name(s). Using the name(s) of the responsible party creates an example or martyr for other misguided individuals whose own lives are so miserable and worthless to themselves, that the thought of being remembered for their deeds provides, value and motivation over the worth of their own life and the lives of

others. Engendering a twisted desire among these individuals to exceed previous acts thus ensuring their place in the annuals of depravity.

The courts and lawgivers of our nation prevent the publishing of the names of innocent individuals to protect them. Would not the prevention of publishing the names of the heinous individuals who commit these acts be a protection of the innocents also?

I believe that in the time of these ever-increasing events and the great National sadness they cause, the public would be served best by the coverage of the event, without the direct identification and unintentional promotion of the responsible individual(s).

Thank you for your time and consideration of these ideas.

John W. Runnels, South Lake Tahoe