

Rejuvenating American Journalism: Some Tentative Policy Proposals

Robert W. McChesney
Gutgsell Endowed Professor
Department of Communication
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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I wish first to thank FTC Chairman Jon Leibowitz, and Susan DeSanti from his staff, for inviting me to participate in this workshop, and all of you for attending. I must also thank my co-author, the journalist John Nichols, who is not here with us today but whose thinking permeates the ideas herein. All of the evidence to support the arguments that follows, unless specifically indicated, comes from our new book, *The Death and Life of American Journalism*.

Our book, which was published in January, was written as this country was in the midst of a sea change in how the crisis in journalism is understood. A year ago, as scores of newspapers closed and those that remained were cut to the bone, the response was almost like shell shock. Newspapers were emphasized because that was and is the primary source of original news, but the crisis extended to all newsrooms. Observers hoped that with the passage of time and a combination of Yankee ingenuity, revolutionary technologies, and an economic recovery, the commercial news media would rebound, and make a successful transition to a digital future. The theory was that we could have a lucrative private news media that would satisfactorily serve our needs for a Fourth Estate. Even the most optimistic scenarios for successful commercial news on the Internet required one or two more decades to pass before the platform would provide anything near a satisfactory level of journalism.

It is now clear that the evidence to support that position does not exist. The notion that commercial media can establish “paywalls” on the Internet and recoup their expenses there is questionable. Certainly some news media will be able to do this with a modicum of success, but only a few, and probably specialized media at that. The argument that the Internet will spawn a new generation of commercially viable citizen news media that will fill the void, too, has little credible evidence to support it. Again, some new digital ventures will make it, but they will replace only a smattering of the enormous losses in newsrooms we are experiencing. The evidence is in that the volunteer labor that fuels the blogosphere is in no position to generate original news stories in any significant quantity or quality.

The awareness of the implausibility of a commercial solution was made more daunting by a growing recognition of how our news media has been unraveling in this era while

we were waiting for the Internet and entrepreneurs to solve our problems. There will be quite a bit of something called “news” in the coming years, but there will not be very much of what we once called journalism. The source of that news will be public relations, with political and economic elites framing and guiding the debates, be they local or national. Today, the ratio of public relations people to working journalists is close to 4-to-1; only 30 years ago, it was just over 1-to-1. In just three or four years, at present rates, the ratio of people paid to surreptitiously shape the news for their corporate and government clients to that of working journalists covering the news will be as high as 6-to-1 or 7-to-1. If we do nothing we are likely to enter a golden age of even more mindless sensationalism and spin and propaganda masquerading as “news.” It is awfully hard to see how we make a graceful transition, or even an ungraceful one, from that living hell to the promised land of high-quality ubiquitous commercial Internet journalism one or two or three decades from now.

The cold reality is that we will have private news media supported by advertising in the coming generations, but such media will only do a portion of what they once did, probably a small portion. While government policies can strive to increase the amount of successful commercial news media that will exist, there is going to be an upper limit to how much the market will generate. And what the market will support will likely be news aimed at the more affluent sector of the population, those that can afford subscription prices or appeal to those advertisers who remain. Left alone, such developments could accentuate and reify the information inequality that Thomas Jefferson emphatically argued was antithetical to a genuine free press in a self-governing society.

The starting point for exiting this dead-end street is the recognition that journalism is best understood as increasingly having the attributes of a public good, not a private good. It is like military defense, physical infrastructure, education, public health and basic research in that regard. It is something society requires, and people want, but the market cannot generate in sufficient quantity or quality. It requires government leadership to exist. There may be an important role for the private sector, but with public goods the government plays quarterback or the game never starts.

The public good nature of journalism was masked for the past century by the emergence of advertising to provide anywhere from 60-100 percent of the revenues for major news media. It sure looked like the market would produce plenty of profitable journalism. Regardless of what we might think of the effects of commercialism and private control upon the content of news—and this is an area of intense scholarly study and debate—it certainly seemed like the market would produce enough of it to meet our needs. Those days, as we all know, are over. In the digital era there will be some advertising revenue to support journalism, but much less than in the past. Advertisers now have innumerable new ways to accomplish their commercial goals, and are no longer tethered to news media.

Likewise, the Internet emphasizes the public good aspect of journalism because it makes the content easily accessible online with virtually no marginal cost. Unlike a private good, if I access a news story it does not mean you cannot access the exact same news

story and it does not undermine my consumption if you do so, or increases the producer's costs. That is unlike a traditional private good, like a hamburger or a pair of socks. If I have a hamburger, you cannot consume the same hamburger without my losing my satisfaction in consuming said hamburger. With news stories online, on the other hand, if anything it increases my enjoyment knowing others are sharing the same story, and I have nothing to lose by making it available to them. And it costs nothing to make the story available to others. This is a recipe for disaster for traditional news media business models.

In short, fitting a commercial news media system into the digital world is an unnatural fit, which is why savvy investors are jumping ship. They would be irrational to do otherwise.

Understood this way, how should we proceed? The first place to look is at our own extraordinary history. At our founding through the first century of our history, Americans held two simultaneous understandings of freedom of the press. First: that the government should not censor or interfere with the press, or someone's right to launch a news medium, something we embrace to this day. Second: that the first duty of the government was to guarantee that a free press system actually exists. *Unless a credible and functioning press system existed, the right to have it uncensored by government was a hollow right.* To the founders and the first several generations of Americans these were complementary, not contradictory, values. The initial champions, on both counts, were Jefferson and James Madison.

There was no notion that "the market," unsubsidized, would produce sufficient journalism; the idea was unthinkable until the late 19th or early 20th century, when, with the striking explosion in advertising, commercial interests began to prosper.

To that end, in the first generations of our nation's history the federal government instituted extraordinarily large postal and printing subsidies with the explicit goal of broadening and deepening the amount of newspapers and periodical in the United States. These were brilliant subsidies that did not favor a single party or viewpoint; indeed, they made much of the abolitionist press possible while also supporting pro-slavery publications. If the United States federal government devoted the same percentage of GDP to subsidizing journalism today that it did in the 1840s, for example, the expenditure would be around \$30 *billion*. Indeed the one area that distinguished the American government from European governments at the time was its commitment to creating a huge and credible democratic press system.

As Professor David Westphal demonstrated in his important and trailblazing research, government subsidies for journalism remain important to this day, though they are nowhere near as important as they were in our first century, before advertising emerged to mask the public-good nature of journalism.

In every US Supreme Court decision on freedom of the press, the founding principle that it was the duty of the government to see that a credible free press system actually exists has been reaffirmed. Otherwise the governing system cannot succeed. As Justice Potter

Stewart put it, the Free Press guarantee is a “structural part” of the constitution. If we care for what the Supreme Court says, our constitution not only condones public subsidies of journalism, it *requires* them.

The primary concern we all have when government gets into the business of subsidizing and creating a free press system is how do we keep the heavy hand of the state from censoring, dominating and dictating the content of the news to suits its own interests? How do we preserve an independent free press at the same time as we subsidize journalism?

For those unaware of our own rich history in this area – which means, regrettably, most Americans of recent times – the problem is unsolvable. Government subsidies of journalism lead inevitably and inexorably to authoritarian, even totalitarian, outcomes. I am sympathetic to the position; enlightened policymaking must never sacrifice our commitment to having a robust, open and uncensored Fourth Estate. It is a reason for why I never embraced or advocated the Fairness Doctrine; like my libertarian friends I do not like policies that call for the government to evaluate journalism content qualitatively.

But perhaps we can learn valuable lessons about journalism subsidies by looking at the record of all those nations with similar economies, freedoms, democratic practices, and civil liberties? Nations like Canada, Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, Japan, Ireland, Slovenia, Norway, Switzerland, Denmark, Finland, Austria, Sweden, Belgium, Australia and France. What are these guys doing?

What we find is that all of these nations explicitly subsidize public media and journalism at far greater rates per capita than does the United States. If we funded public media and journalism annually at the same per capita levels as these nations our federal subsidy would be anywhere from \$7 billion to \$35 billion annually. Most of the above nations listed above are closer to the latter figure than the former. Contrast that with our present \$400 million federal subsidy for public and community broadcasting.

What about the threat of governments using these subsidies to limit democracy and our freedoms? According to the annual ranking of *The Economist* magazine, those countries with the largest public media and press subsidies are the freest and most democratic nations in the world, ahead of the United States. According to Freedom House, those nations with the largest government press subsidies also have the most flourishing and uncensored *private* news media, again far ahead of the United States. Indeed, recent research demonstrates that as press subsidies have increased in European nations, the content of the news has become *more* adversarial toward the party in power and the government in general.

In sum, government press subsidies can work, and come with sufficient protection from government meddling. We can have our cake and eat it too. We can study other nations as well as our own history, and adapt the lessons to our current conditions and technologies. We will have to spend a great deal more than we currently do, but possibly not as much as we did in the past or some European countries do today. One advantage of

the Internet is that it has lowered costs in some areas sharply. The one area it has not eliminated, however, is compensated labor. Any way you slice it, compensated labor in competing independent newsrooms is the basis of a strong free press. We are learning the hard way that you get what you pay for.

I have taken the time to provide this background regarding the current crisis and our own history in order to contextualize and justify what follows, but also to emphasize that I offer this to begin the conversation, not end it. Everything that follows is in rough form, and none of the details have been ironed out. I present them as broad brush strokes, and I ask that they be understood and criticized in that manner. I suspect if the people in this room, in this town, in this country, devoted themselves to establishing great public subsidies for journalism we could surpass anything John Nichols and I have developed or adapted. That is the job before us all if we are to address the crisis in a satisfactory manner.

Even in this crisis, I do not favor any sort of subsidies to “bail out” the commercial firms that have led the charge in consolidating, downsizing, hyper-commercializing, trivializing and eliminating newsrooms. And I doubt many Americans would have much of a taste for a plateful of corporate welfare either. Likewise, I am not platform-centric. This is not an old media vs. new media debate. My assumption is that all media have a digital component, if they are not entirely digital, and that we are in the midst of long historical process that will lead to an almost entirely digital news media. But it is a long process and how we manage the transition will largely determine where we end up.

It is already self-evident that the Internet and digital technologies provide extraordinary opportunities to democratize, improve and transform our journalism for the better, even revolutionize it. But we cannot develop that great potential without a commitment of resources.

The starting points for addressing the crisis are four “shovel-ready” proposals that can stop the bleeding and get journalists back to work covering their communities. To be clear, I speak today for myself. I do not speak for Free Press, the media reform organization that I cofounded. I am but a board member there.

First, we should immediately increase funding to public, community and school broadcasting – in my mind, by a factor of at least ten— with the express designation that the funding go toward journalism, especially at the local level. Remember, the United Kingdom’s per capita funding of public broadcasting is nearly 70 times greater than ours – in this context, a factor of ten is modest. In numerous communities there are few journalists remaining, or those that do remain are overmatched by the enormity of the beats they have been left to cover. Elections are going uncovered, not to mention the less sexy beats in city, county and state government where power is exercised and funds are allocated. Public and community stations are uniquely positioned to get reporters back to work. I use the term “broadcasting” but everything produced would go online and be available for free immediately. We should encourage distinct systems for NPR, PBS, community broadcasting, public access, low-power FM and school broadcasting. We

would never countenance a commercial monopoly over a community's newsrooms; we should see that there are competitive newsrooms in the nonprofit broadcasting sector. Competition and pluralism are good everywhere when it comes to news media.

Second, we are in the process of losing an entire generation to journalism. I can speak from personal experience as a college professor and after traveling this nation far and wide speaking to young people for the past few months that there are tens of thousands of talented young people eager to pursue careers in journalism who are about to dive headfirst into a swimming pool emptied of water. Once they are gone it will be vastly more difficult if not impossible to get them to return. We should launch a "Write for America" or "News AmeriCorps" type program to subsidize thousands of young journalists for a year or two after college working for news media around the country. In some states, like Maryland, unpaid college students are providing a significant part of the coverage of state government to local newspapers. We need what those young people are doing and we need to get them paid jobs. A "Write for America" program, which would cost little in the current scheme of things, would go a long way toward providing that bridge from a good education to a good job—a bridge that currently does not exist.

Third, we lost some 140 daily newspapers in 2009 and many of those that remain are hollowed-out lifeless versions of what existed two or three decades ago. In their present state it seems likely that some, perhaps many, existing dailies will die, too, in the coming years, probably with the next economic downturn. We cannot afford to lose these institutions, their current state notwithstanding. Let's have the Small Business Administration have the funds necessary to facilitate the transition of existing corporate newspapers that are going under to a post-corporate future. Let the SBA help locate local independent owners or non-profit owners of any number of types to take over the control of the local newspaper. If the program works, let's eventually use funds to establish competing dailies in larger communities.

In my view, it is imperative that the principle of the daily newspaper – an institution that serves everyone in the community—remain, even if it going to be primarily digital if not entirely digital down the road. We need news media in our communities where the buck stops, where we can expect important stories to be covered and if they are not we have a right to demand an answer from the editor. We need news media that do not segment us into bite-sized demographic categories, but that link us, educate us about parts of our community we would be unaware of otherwise, and find that which unites us. The market, left to its own devices, increasingly finds this democratic institution an unprofitable undertaking.

Fourth, it is imperative that we keep alive the journals of opinion, weekly news magazines, and political magazines that play an outsized role in our political culture. From the dawn of the Republic to this day, these magazines have depended upon postal subsidies to survive. As PRC Chair Ruth Goldway just chronicled, the situation for periodicals in the United States is dire. There is the distinct possibility the Postal Service will have enormous rate hikes next year that will possibly drive many publications out of business and require those that survive to make drastic cuts. Today many hundreds, even

thousands, of small publications ranging from *The Nation*, *The Progressive*, *In These Times* and *Harper's* on the left to *Reason*, *Human Events*, *National Review* and *The American Conservative* on the right, and many more in between, depend upon lower postal rates. They are all in jeopardy, and with them the breadth and depth of our discourse.

Ironically, the emergence of the Internet makes the survival of these publications even more important. As a forthcoming *Columbia Journalism Review* research report of the web activities of 665 publications demonstrates, significant amount of the original journalism and political material posted online comes from the websites associated with print publications. It provides much of the gist for the blogosphere. When these publications go down or cut back, the amount of original material online is reduced, to all our detriments. Consider my co-author John Nichols, who posts hundreds of original pieces on the Internet annually as part of his job as a staff writer for *The Nation*. These pieces are available for free to all comers, get reposted on numerous other large websites and get ample commentary. If *The Nation* ever closes its “old media” doors, Nichols will be out of a job and his blogging output will be cut back dramatically. There are thousands of similar stories online, and they all depend to some extent of the solvency of the “old media” that employ them. It is serendipitous but no less sublime that Washington's, Madison's and Jefferson's beloved postal subsidies are generating so much valuable free material in the digital realm.

It is imperative that we craft lower postal rates –and soon— for small circulation publications with limited amounts of advertising. It is nonnegotiable that these publications, and American political culture, have this lifeline to make a healthy transition from the analog world to our digital future.

Having done all of the above, we still must face the hard truth that even non-profit or locally owned daily newspapers, not to mention periodicals with low-postage, do not have a credible business model that will allow them to employ the legions of working journalists a Fourth Estate requires. They produce a public good. Some may prosper, but if we want them to actually do journalism in significant amounts, subsidies will remain necessary.

Here we turn to a tax credit proposal by the late, great, and deeply missed Professor C. Edwin Baker of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, the dominant First Amendment expert concerning freedom of the press for the past generation, and a passionate visionary with regard to journalism. Baker thought the government should, in effect, pay one-half the salary of any employed journalist up to \$45,000 per reporter per year. The idea was to dramatically lower the costs of journalism. Ed was convinced fraud could be minimized, although I suspect it would need a great deal of work to make it functional.

Ed Baker and I disagreed on one key point. In his view, this journalist tax credit plan should apply to all news media, commercial or otherwise. I prefer the idea of leaving the commercial news media unsubsidized, except for the postal subsidy, and having the

Baker tax credit go to non-profit media. A similar debate emanates from the “Write for America” program I suggest above—should this program subsidize labor for commercial concerns? This is the type of policy debate we need to have, and where we need more study. If it proves effective, something like the Ed Baker proposal could go a long way toward giving resources to America’s newsrooms without having the hand of government influence content.

All of these measures start with existing structures and institutions and attempt to make them workable in the transition to the coming digital era. They would go a long way toward filling cyberspace with a deep and rich layer of journalism, far greater than exists at present. This would be tremendous grist for citizen journalists and bloggers to work with as they critique and develop news stories. They are a necessary start, and well-funded they could do wonders for our journalism, but they really do not get to the heart of the matter: capitalizing upon the democratic and revolutionary potential of digital technologies for journalism, and democracy.

A great deal of innovation and promise remains unfulfilled. Digital journalism has a wealth of talented people and brilliant ideas and a poverty of resources. Even our best reporters and writers are having a hard time making a living online, and those that are able to get by must continually please funders and advertisers. There is no reason to expect this to change in the foreseeable future.

Ultimately I believe we need to meet the tectonic shift in media with a similarly bold policy approach to the creation of journalism. We need a funding mechanism to spawn viable independent Internet journalism, one that can provide the basis for a stable industry. The trick is to provide ample funding but not to have the government control the allocation of the funds or create a bureaucracy that doles out funds to its preferred media. We need a system that is competitive, accountable and open to innovation. Advertisers and foundations are not up to the job, and the idea of converting computers into vending machines is unappealing and impractical.

So what policy solution is there?

The strongest proposal we have seen has been developed by the economist Dean Baker and his brother Randy Baker over the past decade. (What is it with guys named Baker, anyway?) My proposal embellishes their core concept. For sake of discussion I will call it the “Citizenship News Voucher.” The idea is simple: every American adult gets a \$200 voucher she can use to donate government money to any nonprofit news medium of her choice. She will indicate her choice on her tax return. If she does not file a tax return, a simple form will be available to use. She can split her \$200 among several different qualifying nonprofit media. This program would be purely voluntary, like the tax-form check-offs for funding elections or protecting wildlife. A government agency, possibly operating out of the Internal Revenue Service, can be set up to allocate the funds and to determine eligibility—according to universal standards that err on the side of expanding rather than constraining the number of qualifying media. There will be some overhead

and administration for the program, but it will not require a large regulatory body like the FCC.

This proposal borrows from the libertarian movement, in its recognition that vouchers can be used to give greater control over the expenditure of public tax dollars. Its genius, I believe, is to be found in a healthy combination of hostility to government control over news content and a belief in the power of individuals to make their own choices with a recognition of the public good nature of journalism.

This funding mechanism should apply to public, community and all other nonprofit broadcasters as well as Internet upstarts. For a medium that is not a nonprofit broadcaster to be eligible, it would have to be a not-for-profit, although that can assume a number of legal constructs, including 501(c)(3) or cooperative structures. The medium must do exclusively media content; it cannot be part of a larger organization or have any non-media operations. Everything the medium produces must be made available immediately upon publication on the Internet and made available for free to all. It will not be covered by copyright and will enter the public domain. (This would allow, for instance, a digital outlet to sell a print version of its work.) The government will not evaluate the content to see that the money is going toward journalism. Our assumption is that these criteria will effectively produce that result, and if there is some slippage so be it.

Qualifying media ought not, in our view, be permitted to accept advertising; this is a sector that is to have a direct and primary relationship with its audience. These media can accept tax-deductible donations from individuals or foundations to supplement their income. By banning advertising from public media and this new Internet sector, the pool of advertising that exists can be divvied up between existing and post-corporate newspapers and commercial media, especially commercial broadcasters. In my view, this will give commercial news media a better crack at finding a workable business model.

I would also suggest that for a medium to receive funds it would have to get commitments for at least \$20,000 worth of vouchers. This will lessen fraud and also require anyone wishing to establish a medium to be serious enough to get at least 100 people to sign on. (In other words, you can't just declare yourself a nonprofit news website and deposit the voucher in your bank account.)

So what will the Citizenship News Voucher program generate? It will have two objectives. First, it will be a means for public media organizations to dramatically increase their funding. Imagine a public TV station in a metropolitan area of 1 million people managed to get 50,000 of them to donate half of their Citizenship News Voucher to the station. That would be \$5 million. That goes a long way toward staffing a quality newsroom. It also means that public and community broadcasters will have to earn their support beyond the foundation they are allocated by the government.

Second, the voucher system would provide a way for Web-journalism services to become self-sufficient and even have the funds to hire a significant number of full-time paid workers. Imagine a Web site in the blogosphere right now covering national politics that

produces some great content and has hundreds of thousands of regular visitors, but it depends upon low-paid or volunteer labor and praying for advertising crumbs or begging for donations for what is invariably paltry levels of support. Now the Web site goes formally nonprofit, stops obsessing over advertising crumbs and appeals directly to its readers for their vouchers. Imagine this Web site getting 20,000 people to steer their vouchers into its accounts. That is \$4 million, enough to have a well-paid staff of 50 full-time journalists as well as ancillary staffers. Consider what a Web news service could do with that. And then start thinking about how motivated the reporters and editors would be to break big stories, maintain high quality and keep attracting the vouchers.

Or imagine you live in a city with deplorable news coverage of your community or neighborhood, as more and more Americans do. If someone starts a local news medium and gets 2,000 people to give her group one-half of their vouchers, that provides a nice start-up budget of \$200,000. For that money a group can have several reporters covering their turf, and build up a real following.

The benefits of the Citizenship News Voucher program are many. For instance, it gives the foundation community a coherent and necessary role to play. Rather than see themselves as being hit up in perpetuity to cover the operating costs of various Web-journalism ventures, foundations can do what they do best: they can help launch new ventures, fund them for three to five years, and then see if there is popular support for the venture in the form of Citizenship News Vouchers. In this model, philanthropists have much greater incentive to put money into journalism, because there is a way for their grants to lead to self-sustaining institutions.

This strategy also allows newcomers to enter the fray and hence encourages innovation. A group can raise start-up funds from donations or philanthropy, get started, and then appeal directly for voucher support. It produces intense competition because a medium cannot take its support for granted. It rewards initiative and punishes sloth. It is democratic because rich and poor get the same voucher. And the government has no control over who gets the money. It is an enormous public subsidy, but it is a libertarian's dream: people can support whatever political viewpoints they prefer or do nothing at all. I won't try and predict how effective the Citizenship News Voucher program would be. In a very real sense, the answer has to come from citizens and journalists, which is exactly as it should be.

What I do know, however, is that this approach will give public and community media as well as Internet news media an incentive to earn their support not from investors and advertisers but from the people they are trying to reach. And I also know that nearly every struggling new online journalism outfit I talk to would love to have an opportunity to compete for these funds. I have never explained the concept—in newspaper, radio and television interviews; in speeches and at forums—without being overwhelmed by the practical questions, vibrant ideas and enthusiasm that it sparks among journalists and citizens. That makes complete sense to us, as the voucher system rebuilds the lost link between journalists and the communities that sustain their journalism.

For this program to be accepted it will require two conditions that will be hard pills for some to swallow. First, people will have to accept that some of the vouchers are going to go to media that they may detest. The program requires that Americans embrace dissent in reality and not just rhetoric. Here I cannot help but recall the passionate commitment Jefferson and Madison had to promoting a diverse journalism, even when they often deplored its contents. At the same time Jefferson advocated massive postal and printing subsidies, and basked in the dissenting nature of American newspapers compared to those found elsewhere, he memorably stated, “The man who reads nothing at all is better educated than the man who reads nothing but newspapers.”

Second, the program may not develop exactly the type of journalism our greatest thinkers believe is necessary. The plan requires that there be faith in the judgment of the American people. Like my libertarian friends, this is a risk I am willing to take. My sense is that once people’s choices are direct and not filtered by advertising, good things will happen.

This idea is not set in stone. Yale Law School professor Bruce Ackerman is developing an alternative version of this idea, and possibly others, in a forthcoming book; he may well have a superior model, or at least key ways to improve it. The point is, again, this is the type of study and debate we need to have, and soon.

As Dean Baker puts it, this is an economic model that recognizes in the Internet era that old-fashioned media economics no longer work. You can’t produce a digital product, take it to market and sell it. And you can’t get advertisers to bankroll your operation. The rational policy solution is to give media producers—journalists—money up front, and then make what they produce available to all for free online. It will fill the Web with large amounts of professional-quality journalism, and provide a genuine independent journalism sector to complement post-corporate newspapers, public media and a retooled commercial news media. Those will be the four legs of our new media table.

Ultimately, the legs may be rearranged. More weight may go on one than another. Journalists may flee commercial media and start nonprofit Web sites. Post-corporate digital newspapers might be displaced by public-media Web sites. A new generation of Web-savvy editors might leap from medium to medium, perhaps creating journalistic platforms that we cannot yet imagine. The twists and turns are inevitable and should be welcomed rather than feared. If there are sources of funding, journalists will innovate and the people will decide what works. The possibilities are endless, and endlessly democratic. Above all, in the final analysis, this approach provides a far better guarantee that we will have great journalism in the 21st century than hoping against hope that the market will somehow sort things out.

I will not take up the matter of where the funds to pay for journalism should come from. In our book Nichols and I suggest a number of taxes and fees that could be used to generate the necessary funds. Since publication, some astute readers have criticized our suggestions and provided some possibly stronger alternatives. In general we think there is merit in having a segregated fund that is not subject to political tampering.

At the same time, we should not get hung up on the point of “paying as we go.” When a nation is under military attack, it does whatever is necessary to defend itself. It does not appoint a commission to study whether the nation can afford a military defense and ask the commission to report back in five to ten years time. We need to approach the crisis of journalism with the same sense of urgency because the stakes are exactly the same: whether or not this great American experiment in self-government will survive to another generation. The good news is that if we respond with the same vision and dedication as our founders, we can create the greatest and most diverse journalism our nation or the world has ever seen. History has placed the ball directly in our court.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.