



## **Our American Free Press**

**15 June 2020**

As a citizen of America – endowed with a free and independent press - I want to be informed about what is happening in my backyard, my state, my country and the world. I want the press to educate me but not to editorialize; I can come to my own conclusions. I often feel today that I am being force-fed an agenda under the guise of objective journalism. I prefer pure, unadulterated journalism but feel I need to switch between CNN and Fox News in order to get a balance of the extremes. This is not what the concept of a free press was about.

Both of my parents were journalism majors in college which, by itself, does not mean that I understand the art and science of journalism. However, it does mean that I respect good journalism since I respect my parents and they were trained in it.

I am old enough to remember when the network news related information about events in a – not perfect but perhaps a little closer to perfect – objective manner. That being said there was normally a segment towards the end of the broadcast dedicated to an editorial opinion from a senior journalist or broadcaster. This was the time when you turn off the analytical side of your mind which distilling the facts into your opinion based on the facts and, instead, listened to someone else's views. You may not have agreed with Larry Cronkite's editorial but it was his, not yours, so that was ok. Hopefully, this opinion was based on fact and a level of understanding that was better or at least defensibly different from yours. If it was solid enough, it might even alter your opinion; win-win.

I am a big fan of the American press. There are few countries in the world that have a truly free press and it should be protected at all costs. All costs. Without a voice there is no freedom, there is no progress. The American press helps form and underwrite America's voice. This is a huge responsibility.

However, technology, profits, politics, hubris and even time have placed an incredible if not impossible burden upon today's reporters. They, like everyone it seems, have been forced to take a side. In my mind, good journalism is good fence-sitting. An able reporter should sit at the top of the high fence, looking both ways, all ways, periodically jumping off to take a closer look but then coming back again to tell the story. This is a science but it is also an art, reliant upon individual training and discipline plus the free will of the journalist to execute his or her craft fully aware of their incredible and sacred responsibility.

I think our free press, indeed, like our country, is out of the flow, swimming against the tide of insurmountable revenue goals, incredible dilution of communication sources created by the Internet and a lack of support by those who influence and protect the independence required by a free press.

I believe most journalists understand their mission and embrace it but, due to the erosion of the foundation which had supported it for so long - or perhaps partnerships is a better word - it has had to exit the flow and charter a course with the prevailing wind in order to survive at all.

These winds need to change. I am convinced that those within the leadership of the journalistic profession – and I intentionally separate journalism from social media, as well as information and data harvesting – want to be true to their journalistic oath. Those of us, in the positions of government and society who influence and manipulate the rules of journalism have an equal responsibility to the solemn purpose of the press.

How do we fix it? We come together, assess where we are, determine where we want to be, connect the dots and make it happen. It must involve all constituents which, from the perspective of informing everyone, involves representation from everyone. It won't be easy but if our mission is clear and our agendas are transparent and agreeable, then we can do it.

Let's get started.