

“Democracy” Sample Editorial

America’s free press is in crisis. Today, local journalism, which is necessary to maintaining an informed and active citizenry, is on life support.

Since the advent of the internet, Big Tech companies – namely Facebook and Google – have used their power to manipulate the online news industry for their own financial gain. They set the rules for how, where and when we see news content online and how much revenue is made, and the government has failed to step in.

By not negotiating with local and small news publishers on usage terms, and refusing to pay them fairly for their work, Big Tech has driven many local outlets out of business. And as newsrooms have downsized or shuttered, Big Tech has filled the void with untrustworthy sources.

These platforms are built to elevate content that drive clicks – favoring extreme and outrageous misinformation. Their revenue models are built to distribute divisive content, which could not be more alarming in our highly fractured and partisan environment. They undervalue quality news content and, as a result, the information ecosystem has grown increasingly confusing and unhealthy.

For our democracy to function properly, the government has a duty to make sure that every industry is operating fairly, and that major economic players are conducting business responsibly. As the spread of dangerous misinformation online has permeated our culture, we have all seen just how critical quality journalism is to sustaining a civic society. Elected officials now have a responsibility to reign in Big Tech – to restore fairness to the media industry and safeguard a pillar of our democracy.

We are asking our members of Congress to support the Journalism Competition and Preservation Act (JCPA), a bipartisan bill specifically aimed at addressing Google and Facebook’s threat to the free press. The JCPA would provide a temporary, limited antitrust safe harbor for small, local news publishers to collectively negotiate with Facebook and Google for fair compensation for the use of their content. It’s narrowly tailored to ensure that coordination by news publishers is only in the interest of protecting trustworthy, quality journalism, and is designed to incentivize and reward publishers who are investing in journalists and newsroom personnel. In fact, publishers that demonstrate an investment in their journalists will receive a higher portion of the funds that result from the negotiations each year.

In today’s partisan political climate, it is rare for Democrats and Republicans to agree on anything – but the JCPA is one important exception. The JCPA has bipartisan support, and elected officials from both parties agree that passing the JCPA will bring about much-needed change by making the news and publishing industries fairer for smaller media entities and local operators.

We applaud those members of Congress across the country and on both sides of the aisle who have already shown their commitment to local journalism by co-sponsoring the JCPA. But we need support from every member of Congress to ensure small and local newspapers are finally able to ask the tech platforms for the compensation they need and deserve.

We hope the [STATE] congressional delegation will agree that the honest, quality reporting we provide for our community – and the future of all local journalism – is worth fighting for. We urge them to join their colleagues in co-sponsoring the JCPA today.