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Designating April 2024 as “Preserving and Protecting Local News Month”
and recognizing the importance and significance of local news.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

APRIL 18, 2024

Mr. SCHATZ (for himself, Mr. FETTERMAN, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Ms. CANTWELL, Mr. PADILLA, Mr. WELCH, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. WYDEN, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. WARNER, Mr. KELLY, Mr. KING, and Ms. BUTLER) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary

RESOLUTION

Designating April 2024 as “Preserving and Protecting Local News Month” and recognizing the importance and significance of local news.

Whereas the United States was founded on the principle of freedom of the press enshrined in the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which declares that “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press . . .”;

Whereas an informed citizenry depends on accurate and unbiased news reporting to inform the judgment of the people;

Whereas a robust, diverse, and sustainable local news presence leads to civic engagement and the buttressing of democratic norms and practices;

Whereas local news provides vital information on local, State, and national elections to help United States citizens execute their civic responsibility;

Whereas the absence of local news outlets and investigative reporting allows local government corruption and corporate malfeasance to go unchecked;

Whereas local journalists help combat misinformation and disinformation by using their community knowledge and connections to debunk fraudulent or misleading content;

Whereas local cable franchises routinely provide for public educational and government access channels on their systems, and those channels—

- (1) offer vital local civic programming that informs communities;
- (2) provide news and information not often available on other local broadcast channels or cable;
- (3) supplement local journalism; and
- (4) at times, are the only source for local news;

Whereas more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the United States citizenry trust local news sources;

Whereas, according to recent research—

- (1) the United States has lost nearly 2,900 local print outlets since 2005, which accounts for over $\frac{1}{4}$ of all local print outlets, and is on track to lose $\frac{1}{3}$ of all local print outlets by 2025;
- (2) an average of 2.5 local print outlets are being shuttered every week in the United States;

(3) more than 200 of the 3,143 counties and county equivalents in the United States have no local newspaper at all, creating a news shortage for the roughly 4,000,000 residents of those areas;

(4) of the remaining counties in the United States, more than $\frac{1}{2}$ have only 1 newspaper to cover populations ranging from fewer than 1,000 to more than 1,000,000 residents and $\frac{2}{3}$ have no daily newspaper, with fewer than 100 of these counties having a digital substitute;

(5) more than $\frac{1}{2}$ of all newspapers in the United States have changed owners during the past decade, and, in 2020, the 25 largest newspaper ownership companies owned $\frac{1}{3}$ of all daily newspapers, including 70 percent of newspapers that still circulate daily;

(6) of the surviving 6,700 newspapers in the United States, thousands now qualify as “ghost newspapers”, or newspapers with reporting and photography staffs that are so significantly reduced that they can no longer provide much of the breaking news or public service journalism that once informed readers about vital issues in their communities;

(7) rural counties are among the counties most deeply impacted by the loss of local reporting, as more than 500 of the nearly 2,900 newspapers that have closed since 2005 are in rural counties; and

(8) researchers at Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism estimate that 228 counties in the United States are at an elevated risk of becoming news deserts in the next 5 years, which would inordinately impact high-poverty areas in the South and Midwest and communities with significant Black, Latino, and Native American populations;

Whereas, while overall employment in newspaper, television, radio, and digital newsrooms dropped by roughly 26 percent, or 30,000 jobs, between 2008 and 2020, the plunge in newspaper newsrooms alone was much worse at 57 percent, or 40,000 jobs, during that same time period;

Whereas the number of news employees in the radio broadcasting industry dropped by 26 percent between 2008 and 2020;

Whereas more than 21,400 media jobs were lost in 2023, the highest number, excluding 2020, since the height of the Great Recession in 2009;

Whereas digital native publications have laid off hundreds of journalists, including over 500 in January 2024 alone, and many of those publications have shuttered during the last year;

Whereas beat reporting, meaning the day-to-day coverage of a particular field that allows a journalist to develop expertise and cultivate sources, has ceased to be a viable career for would-be journalists due to the decimation of newsroom budgets;

Whereas requests submitted under section 552 of title 5, United States Code (commonly referred to as “Freedom of Information Act requests”), by local newspapers to local, State, and Federal agencies fell by nearly 50 percent between 2005 and 2010, demonstrating a significant drop in the extent to which local reporters request government records;

Whereas newspapers alone lost more than \$39,800,000,000 in advertising revenue between 2005 and 2020;

Whereas the sponsorship revenue of all-news radio stations dropped by 25 percent between 2019 and 2021;

Whereas there remains a significant gender disparity in newsroom employment, with women comprising approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of staff who are 30 years of age or older;

Whereas women who are local television news anchors and reporters, especially women of color, are often subject to harassment and stalking;

Whereas, across the United States, there are nearly 300 media outlets that primarily serve Black communities, and, in recent years, many of those newspapers have seen—

(1) significant losses in advertising revenue as small businesses in their communities were forced to close; and

(2) declines in circulation due to the closures of businesses in their communities;

Whereas the number of Black journalists working at daily newspapers dropped by 40 percent between 1997 and 2014, more than for any other demographic group, and the exodus of journalists from local news outlets exacerbated amid the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic has been disproportionately borne by Black constituencies;

Whereas the number of print media sources published by and for Native American readers has shrunk dramatically in recent years, from 700 media outlets in 1998 to only 200 in 2018;

Whereas Tribally owned news outlets are often dependent on Tribal governments for funding, but most of those outlets lack the policy structure necessary to fully protect journalistic independence;

Whereas a 2018 survey by the Native American Journalists Association found that 83 percent of respondents believed

that Native press coverage of Tribal government affairs was sometimes, frequently, or always censored;

Whereas there are more than 620 Latino news media outlets in the United States, including more than 275 independently owned print publications, and collectively these news media outlets primarily rely on a declining advertising revenue base;

Whereas the lack of local news impacts communities that speak languages other than English, which are often excluded from national media coverage;

Whereas investments in local journalism have mainly focused on larger media markets, contributing to inequities and a journalistic divide between affluent and low-income communities;

Whereas student journalists, at both the college and high school level, have stepped in to play an important role reporting on their local communities despite the lack of educational resources and support;

Whereas the Pew Research Center reports that nearly 1 in 10 statehouse reporters are student journalists;

Whereas more than 360 local newsrooms have closed from the onset of the COVID–19 pandemic in early 2020 to the present day;

Whereas the COVID–19 pandemic took a substantial economic toll on the local news industry, contributing to budget cuts, staff layoffs, and scores of newsroom closures, from which the industry has yet to fully recover, as epitomized by mass layoffs and closures at several local news outlets in the 50 States and the District of Columbia in 2023 and early 2024;

Whereas PEN America proposed “a major reimagining of the local news space” in its 2019 call-to-action report, “Losing the News: The Decimation of Local Journalism and the Search for Solutions”, and called on society and the Federal Government to urgently address the alarming demise of local journalism; and

Whereas, half a century ago, Congress perceived that the commercial television industry would not independently provide the educational and public interest broadcasting that was appropriate and necessary for the country, and, informed by an independent report prepared by the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television, created the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which has since ensured that radio and television include public interest educational and reporting programs using annually appropriated funds: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2 (1) designates April 2024 as “Preserving and
3 Protecting Local News Month”;

4 (2) affirms that local news serves an essential
5 function in the democracy of the United States;

6 (3) recognizes local news as a public good; and

7 (4) acknowledges the valuable contributions of
8 local journalism towards the maintenance of healthy
9 and vibrant communities.

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