

SUBSIDIZING THE PRESS: UNDERSTANDING JOURNALISTS'  
ATTITUDES ABOUT CORPORATE AND GOVERNMENT  
INFLUENCE AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

SUBSIDIZING THE PRESS: UNDERSTANDING JOURNALISTS'  
ATTITUDES ABOUT CORPORATE AND GOVERNMENT  
INFLUENCE AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST

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a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts,

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To my husband, who not only empowered me to continue my education but who provided unwavering encouragement every step of the way. From patting me on the back at each academic milestone to caring for our family — the ballet rehearsals, the school pickups, the cooking — as I plugged away at this thesis. James, your support means everything to me.

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ABSTRACT

U.S. newspaper companies have been slashing resources, resulting in less original reporting and raising questions about whether private-sector newspapers can adequately serve the public interest. According to social responsibility theory, if the press can't fulfill its obligation to serve society, the government could intervene to ensure that it does. Journalists, protective of their watchdog role, are widely assumed to reject the idea of government involvement. But is this assumption valid, especially at a time when corporate decision-making appears to have strained newsrooms?

Semi-structured interviews with newsroom workers at Oregon's four largest daily newspapers revealed that the journalists were keenly aware of market conditions that limited their ability to serve the public interest. Despite management decisions that resulted in shrunken staff and diluted news coverage, however, the journalists believed corporate governance had little influence over their ability to serve the public interest. But when asked to imagine the government as a source of newspaper revenue, the journalists were fearful that subsidies could compromise their watchdog role. Because of newspapers' dire circumstances, however, most of the journalists were open to exploring the potential of expanded government subsidies to prop up newspapers, as long as they came with assurances that the government would not meddle in news coverage. A limited understanding of how these subsidies might work prevented many of the journalists from embracing the idea more fully, an indication that the government's role in supporting the free press has been largely absent from discussions about newspaper reform.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The U.S. newspaper industry is in crisis. Subscriptions, circulation, and overall revenue have been in sharp decline since the early 2000s, with no reprieve in sight. Newspapers reluctantly cling to an outdated and unprofitable print model, supported by advertisers and subscribers, while struggling to make up losses in the digital arena. Even though traffic to newspapers' digital products has grown, total advertising revenue slipped 10 percent from 2015 to 2016 (Barthel, 2017). Even though digital subscription rates surged after the 2016 presidential election, overall circulation dropped 8 percent (Barthel, 2017). Faced with this stark financial reality, newspaper companies have responded with cuts.

Amid a wave of massive industry consolidation and economic hardship, at least 126 daily newspapers have shuttered since 2004 (Barthel, 2016). Those that have survived have suffered massive staff reductions. For a long time, the typical formula for newsroom staffing was one journalist for every 1,000 newspapers sold daily, and in the 1990s, many midsize papers had 1.5 or two journalists for every 1,000 papers (Reinardy, 2017). After the early 2000s, though, "newspaper employment went from a thriving occupation to an endangered workforce" (Reinardy, 2017, p. 3). "Paper Cuts," an interactive database of U.S. newspaper layoffs, reported more than 40,000 newspaper layoffs and buyouts from 2007 to 2011, the period during which the project operated (Reinardy, 2017). As of 2015, 41,400 people worked in newspaper newsrooms, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Employment Statistics; that's a loss of 37 percent since 2004 (Barthel, 2017).

Elusive profits and shrinking newsrooms leave serious doubts about the newspaper industry's sustainability. Of course, in capitalist America, a lot of industries fail — but few also support a democratic institution (Clarke, 2009). When newspapers fail, the Fourth Estate goes down with them, because despite the proliferation of broadcast and digital news sources, newspapers are still the primary newsgatherers (Abernathy, 2016; Greenberg, 2012; McChesney, 2012; Picard, 2013; Pickard, 2013). “The result is that society remains dependent on newspapers for breadth and depth of news and information,” says Picard (2013, p. 54). Yet as newspapers' print editions lose readers, their online editions don't fare better. Newspapers' websites — especially in local markets — continue to reach fewer readers than their distressed print editions do, Chyi and Tenenboim (2017) found. And consumers are more likely to access information through news aggregators, such as Yahoo, than through newspaper websites (Chyi & Tenenboim, 2017). But these aggregators are not producing original reporting; that responsibility still belongs to newspapers.

The amount of original reporting newspapers are producing is dwindling, though (McChesney, 2012; Reinardy, 2017; Waldman & Working Group of Information Needs of Communities, 2011). Newsroom changes such as cuts have resulted in watered-down coverage of civic beats — courts, education, city halls, state legislatures and Congress — and have effectively weakened or eliminated the watchdogs that hold these agencies accountable, inviting corruption and misuse of taxpayer money (Waldman & Working Group of Information Needs of Communities, 2011). The whittling of this so-called broccoli journalism — it's good for people even if it's unpopular — reduces content to buzz, with news organizations focusing less on journalism and more on internet traffic

(Waldman & Working Group of Information Needs of Communities, 2011). Newsroom managers heap praise on reporters who can generate page views, consequently endorsing content that takes little time and effort to produce at the expense of investigative journalism (Reinardy, 2017). Meanwhile, as their ranks shrink, news staffs are less able to scrutinize and counter claims in press releases, empowering special interests to create propaganda that masquerades as news (McChesney, 2012). The impact is dire, says Robert W. McChesney, a media reform advocate: “All signs point to a continued deterioration of journalism” (2012, p. 682).

These signs of deterioration are unmistakable in the midst of the newspaper industry’s economic crisis, but they are not altogether new. In 1947, criticism that the press was beholden to big businesses, that it was monopolistic, and that it wielded too much influence prompted a review of the state of the American free press (Hutchins, 1947). The resulting report, by the Hutchins Commission, introduced a code of social responsibility, which Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956) later molded into social responsibility theory. According to social responsibility theory, the press has an obligation to serve the needs of society, and if it can’t fulfill its obligation, the government could intervene to ensure that it does (Siebert et al., 1956).

Many newspaper reform proposals stop short of large-scale government intervention, though, often trumpeting alternative business models, such as nonprofits (Greenberg, 2012); business forms that prioritize the public interest while still allowing newspapers to make a small profit, like low-profit limited liability corporations (L3Cs) or benefit corporations (Picard & Van Weezel, 2008; Pickard, Stearns, & Aaron, 2009); or employee stock-ownership plans (Pickard et al., 2009). Other proposals call for retaining

the for-profit business model but transforming the organizational culture. Emphasis might be on long-term value rather than short-term profits (Maguire, 2003), on services rather than products (Sullivan, 2006), or on community-oriented journalism (Nerone, 2009).

However, some media critics are adamant that reform would be futile without government regulation (Stucke & Grunes, 2009) or large federal subsidies (Clarke, 2009; Pickard et al., 2009; McChesney, 2012; Nichols and McChesney, 2009). A government investment in news could be viewed similarly to an investment in other public goods, such as education or medical research (Clarke, 2009; McChesney, 2012; Pickard et al., 2009). This proposal is widely viewed as unpopular, though, because of fears that government funding would threaten journalists' role as a government watchdog (McChesney, 2012; Pickard, 2013). Whether this perception is prevalent among journalists today, however, is unclear, as there is little research to support the assumption. Meanwhile, it is reasonable to ponder whether journalists' autonomy is any more threatened by government support than it is by corporate cuts. Craft (2010) says the press, as an institution, is generally free from government intrusion but restricted by economic forces.

The purpose of this study is to explore whether journalists think government subsidies for newspapers would compromise journalists' ability to serve the public interest any differently than corporate governance of newspapers does. Guided by social responsibility theory, this qualitative interview study focuses on journalists of varying job responsibilities in newsrooms at daily newspapers in Oregon.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1, *Introduction*, explains the research problem, the purpose of this study, and an explanation of terms used in this

study. Chapter 2, *Literature Review*, discusses the theoretical framework for this study, social responsibility theory, and reviews previous research related to the following: the landscape of the newspaper industry, arguments in favor of press subsidies, U.S. precedent for government intervention, other options for government support, government influence on the press, press-subsidy models overseas, and attitudes about the U.S. news media and press subsidies. The literature review concludes with the research questions this study aims to answer. Chapter 3, *Methods*, justifies a qualitative approach to this study and outlines how data were collected and analyzed. Chapter 4, *Findings*, discusses the primary themes identified in this research: newspapers' transformation, including perceptions of the industry's crisis and changes to journalists' news work; funding options to save public-interest journalism; perceptions of government support for newspapers; pressure for journalists to appease financial stakeholders; journalism as a public good; and the threat of government support versus corporate ownership. Chapter 5, *Discussion*, presents the researcher's interpretations of the findings related to the three research questions. In Chapter 6, this thesis concludes with an assessment of its contribution to the field, as well as the study's limitations and further research possibilities.

### **Explication of Concepts**

**Public interest.** For the purposes of this study, the definition of public interest will be guided by the Hutchins Commission and social responsibility theory. In its 1947 report, the Hutchins Commission outlined five requirements of the press:

1. A truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning.

2. A forum for the exchange of comment and criticism.
3. A means of protecting the opinions and attitudes of the groups in the society to one another.
4. A method of presenting and clarifying the goals and values of society.
5. A way of reaching every member of the society by the currents of information, thought, and feeling which the press supplies. (Hutchins, 1947, pp. 20-21)

Similarly, according to Siebert et al. (1956), social responsibility theory “accepts the role of the press in servicing the political system, in enlightening the public, [and] in safeguarding the liberties of the individual” (p. 74). Public interest will be understood as citizens’ need for these functions, and public-interest journalism will be understood as journalism that meets these needs.

**Subsidies.** Murschetz (2013) uses the term state aid to mean “a cash payment or financial assistance from a government or other public authority to a person or company” (p. 21). While he favors the term state aid, he notes that it is also sometimes referred to as subsidies or support. This study will adopt Murschetz’s (2013) definition; however, because the scope of this study is limited to the United States, the term subsidies, rather than state aid, will be used to avoid confusion with money from U.S. state governments. Murschetz (2013) says subsidies for newspapers typically serve two purposes: to reduce the cost of producing a commodity and bringing it to market and to increase consumption beyond what would be feasible as a result of competitive market forces.

**Corporate governance.** When investors put money into a company, they expect to get their money back and more. How they ensure a return on their investment is called

corporate governance (Shleifer & Vishny, 1997). According to Picard (2005), corporate governance involves relationships between owner and management, distribution of power, and accountability. “Corporate governance in media companies is not merely important as a business issue, but because of its effects [on] the content of media and the ability of media firms to carry out their social functions” (Picard, 2005, p. 7).

Picard notes that a corporate governance school of thought is that “owners are supposed to act and influence firms, to pressure and influence management, and to protect their interests as owners” (2005, p. 3). An example of such influence in media companies might include owners’ pressuring management to cut newsroom budgets or lay off staff if shareholders believe it will give them a financial advantage. Owners’ influence isn’t necessarily limited to financial interests either; it could be political. While corporate governance involves complex business concepts, for the purpose of this study, it will be generally understood as the power financial stakeholders have to effect management decisions that may benefit them financially.

**Public good.** This study will adopt McChesney’s (2012) definition of public good: “something society requires but that the market cannot produce in sufficient quality or quantity” (p. 687). Pickard et al. (2009), Clarke (2009), McChesney (2012), and Pickard (2013) view journalism as a public good.

**Newspapers.** This study focuses on newspapers because among the various forms of news media, newspapers remain the primary producers of original content (Abernathy, 2016; Greenberg, 2012; McChesney, 2012; Picard, 2013; Pickard, 2013). Newspapers, however, are not limited to print media. They typically publish online in addition to print, and some no longer even produce print editions. For the purposes of this study,



newspapers are publications — whether in print or online — that produce original, general news content for audiences defined primarily by geographic area. The discussion about saving newspapers does not hinge on whether the print medium should be rescued but on whether newspapers' newsgathering operations are essential to society and should persist.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Scholars exploring the viability of government subsidies for newspapers have studied public media models around the world. They've studied the impact of government subsidies on journalistic quality and government interference. Largely absent from the body of literature, though, are studies of Americans' attitudes about government funding of the press. Attitudes of journalists, in particular, who have been taught to be wary of influence by institutions over which they serve as watchdogs, should be explored as part of the broader question of whether government subsidies are a viable solution to the United States' newspaper crisis.

While such a solution has historically been met with resistance, mounting fears of corporate corruption of the free press just might be enough to galvanize the debate. In an April 2018 editorial, *The Denver Post's* editorial board chastised the newspaper's hedge-fund owner for profit-motivated cuts and called for civic leaders to demand a greater investment in local journalism (Denver Post Editorial Board, 2018). In an accompanying opinion article, former *Post* editor Gregory L. Moore said the government, among other stakeholders, should be involved in identifying a solution to the newspaper's crisis (Moore, 2018). At the same time, Report for America, a nonprofit organization modeled after the government-subsidized AmeriCorps program, was launched with the goal of placing 1,000 journalists in understaffed newsrooms within the next four years (Bowles, 2018). These recent developments suggest journalists' appetite for solving the news crisis is prompting them to look at solutions beyond the private sector.

## **Social Responsibility Theory**

Concerns about commercialization of the media are not new, though. Fears of corporate control of the news cropped up in the 1940s after the United States entered World War II (Hutchins, 1947; Nerone, 1995; Siebert et al., 1956). In response, the Hutchins Commission was formed to scrutinize the state of the American free press (Hutchins, 1947).

The first of its kind, the Hutchins Commission's public inquiry was a milestone because it was perhaps the first time government intervention was contemplated as a means of correcting the shortcomings of the free press (McQuail, 2010). The report emphasized the concept of social responsibility in the press. Whereas Siebert et al. (1956) suggest this was unpopular in the newspaper industry because of fears of government intervention, Nerone (1995) says the media viewed it as a way to prevent government regulation on the heels of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, which boosted the federal government's influence. After World War II, news audiences began to demand coverage that reflected a broad range of ideas without political bias, and social responsibility theory emerged in practice in the 1970s, when newspapers began to seek out what people wanted to read, favoring fairness and balance (Nerone, 1995).

Social responsibility theory was borne of libertarian theory, among the four normative theories of the press introduced by Siebert et al. (1956) about a decade after the Hutchins Commission released its report. The major premise of social responsibility theory is that "the press, which enjoys a privileged position under our government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society" (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 74). Social

responsibility theory demands that if the press does not assume its responsibilities, another agency must step in to ensure that the mass media's functions are carried out (Siebert et al., 1956). So if social responsibility in the media is dwindling rather than growing, reform is necessary on the part of one of the areas the Hutchins Commission looked at for press improvement: the industry itself, the public, or the government (Hutchins, 1947; Siebert et al., 1956). The suggestion that the government may intervene is a notable difference between social responsibility theory and its predecessor, as libertarian theory puts the onus on the individual and is wary of government influence (Siebert et al., 1956).

Nerone (1995), who revisited Siebert et al.'s (1956) normative theories four decades later, argues that social responsibility theory is hardly a substantial change from libertarian theory, however. He says that social responsibility theory is vague; that it fails to detail structural changes, such as government regulation; and that, despite being open to government intervention, it relies too heavily on self-regulation (Nerone, 1995). "The watchdog role of the press is as much threatened by weakness from within as by governmental interference from without," Nerone states (1995, p. 104).

Despite Nerone's criticisms of social responsibility theory, it's clear that today's newspaper crisis — with profit-driven decisions weakening American journalism (Greenberg, 2012; McChesney, 2012; Pickard et al., 2009) — is not unlike the scenario the Hutchins Commission (1947) described as worthy of corrective action. Because social responsibility theory emphasizes service to society and hints at government intervention, it is an appropriate framework for research about journalists' attitudes about government subsidies for journalism and how it would affect their ability to serve the public interest.

This research examines journalists' opinions about how financial influences affect the press's ability to serve the public interest within the framework of social responsibility theory. It does not examine how others — media consumers or financial stakeholders — perceive press performance or how journalism conforms to the tenets of social responsibility theory. Meanwhile, the social responsibility framework is not conducive to answering whether press subsidies are a viable model for newspaper reform or examining the effectiveness of any particular form of government subsidy. However, because social responsibility theory is concerned with how the press should function within a democracy, research using this framework could potentially inform policy decisions in the future.

### **The Newspaper Landscape**

Depending on the database cited, there are anywhere from 7,000 to 12,000 newspapers in the United States (Abernathy, 2016). Not only is that number on decline — many newspapers have merged or been shut down — but so is the number of owners. In 2014, there were 3,034 newspaper owners in the U.S., down from 3,897 just 10 years earlier because many independent and family-owned newspapers were acquired by large chains (Abernathy, 2016). Most of the local newspapers that have survived are small dailies and weeklies (Abernathy, 2016). Abernathy's (2016) data come from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill analysis of more than 9,500 local newspapers.

Before the Great Recession, consolidation of ownership was driven by publicly traded chains, but in the past decade, another type of owner has aggressively entered the publishing realm: investment groups such as hedge funds and private equity firms. By

2014, six of the 10 largest newspaper owners, based on number of papers owned, were investment entities, the top two being GateHouse Media and Digital First Media (Abernathy, 2016). Abernathy (2016) says these companies are vastly different from traditional newspaper companies because they lack journalism experience and the sense of social mission that newspapers and publishers embrace. Instead, their mission is to make money for investors, so their focus is on short-term earnings, and they're prepared to get rid of any holdings that are not profitable. So it's not surprising that more than a third of newspapers have changed ownership since 2004, sometimes multiple times (Abernathy, 2016).

Because this social-responsibility study focuses on newspapers in Oregon, it's also worth examining the makeup of the newspaper industry there. Oregon, a largely rural state with just one major metropolitan area and a handful of medium-size cities, has 16 daily paid-circulation newspapers, according to membership numbers from the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association (n.d.). This includes mostly small community newspapers; a few midsize newspapers; and one metro, *The Oregonian*, which serves the Portland metropolitan area's population of about 2.4 million (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). There are also more than 50 weeklies, multi-weeklies or unpaid-circulation newspapers. Ownership among Oregon's dailies features a mix of large conglomerates, both publicly traded (Gannett Company Inc. and Lee Enterprises) and privately owned (Advance Publications); privately owned national and regional chains; and a few local owners.

Several of these newspapers have changed ownership in recent years. In some cases, newspapers have been acquired by chains. For example, the family that owned *The Register-Guard* in Eugene sold the paper in 2018 to one of the nation's largest newspaper

conglomerates, hedge-fund-owned GateHouse. In a couple of cases, though, community newspapers have returned to local ownership. Rosebud Media Group, a small Southern Oregon media company, purchased two local newspapers from GateHouse in 2017 (Stiles, 2017), and in 2015, a group of local investors purchased the Roseburg newspaper from a multi-state chain (“Roseburg investors,” 2015).

### **The Case for Government Funding**

While some media advocates argue that accepting government money would compromise an industry that serves as an institutional watchdog, corporate media are no less compromised by stockholders’ interests and profit-driven cuts, argues Clarke (2009). Craft (2010) says that while journalists have individual control over newsgathering, news organizations are restricted by economic, social, and political forces. “Institutionally speaking, then, the U.S. press is not, in fact, entirely free” (Craft, 2010, p. 46). If media companies were concerned about the public good more than their bottom line, they would welcome a hand from the government — which is responsible, under the First Amendment, for promoting “the widest possible dissemination of diverse viewpoints,” say Pickard et al. (2009). Nichols and McChesney (2009) go as far as calling government funding a necessity.

Pickard et al. (2009), Clarke (2009), and McChesney (2012) compare a government investment in news with federal support for other public goods, such as education or medical research. Clarke states:

The value you place on one dose of a vaccine (you won’t get sick and die) is lower than the value society places on the vaccine (you won’t make everyone else

die either). The government can and should close the gap between the individual value and the social value. (2009, para. 7)

Nichols and McChesney (2009) compare such an investment to an infrastructure project, with the added benefit of creating more jobs for journalists, which would serve as an economic stimulus.

In their descriptive research, Pickard et al. (2009) explore a wealth of contemporary remedies for the newspaper crisis, including new commercial models, low-profit and nonprofit models, and support from foundations and private endowments. But looking at economic models is not enough; they argue that the government's role in supporting journalism must be part of the equation (Pickard et al., 2009). "It is in large part policy decisions — and the political will to make the right ones — that will decide what is next for journalism" (Pickard et al., 2009, p. 48).

### **U.S. Precedent**

The idea that the government should subsidize the press is not novel, however. Picard (2013) argues that the press has never been completely independent from government because a democratic society demands a relationship between free markets and the state. The U.S. already subsidizes the press in the form of broadcast licenses, copyright protections, postal discounts, legal notices, and tax breaks (Cowan & Westphal, 2010; Nichols & McChesney, 2009; Pickard, 2013). James Madison, one of the Founding Fathers, believed that charging to mail a newspaper was a form of censorship and that postage fees would disadvantage dissident newspapers, the very voices that needed to be encouraged for democracy to thrive (McChesney, 2016). George Washington and Madison "were right to create postal subsidies to assure that the public was informed,"



say Cowan and Westphal (2010, p. 3). And while legal notices or public notices, which government agencies are often required to purchase in newspapers, are another means of ensuring the public is informed, they are also another means of subsidizing publications. They are an important source of newspapers' funding, accounting for hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue for periodicals (Cowan & Westphal, 2010). The federal tax code, meanwhile, provides a \$150 million subsidy to newspapers in the form of lost tax revenue for publishers' circulation expenditures, and tax breaks at the state level total at least \$750 million — probably much higher because many states don't report separate data for publishers (Cowan & Westphal, 2010).

The government has also inserted itself into the media industry by means of regulation, with measures such as antitrust laws and the Fairness Doctrine, which required broadcasters to cover controversial issues of public importance in a balanced manner (Pickard, 2013). Greenberg (2012) and Pickard (2013) cite the Newspaper Preservation Act of 1970, which allowed newspapers in competing markets to form joint operating agreements, as an example of the federal government's intervening to protect the institution of journalism.

The amount of money the government spends to support journalism today, however, has markedly declined. In the 1840s, when the post office researched the size of the federal government's subsidy of journalism, the U.S. each year was spending the equivalent of what would be \$35 billion today, roughly what Norway, Sweden, and Denmark spend, on a per-capita basis, on journalism (McChesney, 2016). But the U.S. government spends nowhere near that amount on journalism now. The biggest hit has come from postal subsidies, say Cowan and Westphal (2010). In 1970s, the Postal

Service subsidized 75 percent of the cost of mailing periodicals, compared with 11 percent now, and newspapers have been fighting to preserve legal notices as governments lobby to post them to their websites instead (Cowan & Westphal, 2010).

Besides subsidizing American publications, the U.S. government has even set a public-press precedent beyond its own borders. After World War II, while domestic U.S. policy told a story of free-market ideology, U.S. policy in Germany told a story of a government that viewed subsidies as a boon to press freedom. Troger (2012) explains how Germany's news media thrive today because the U.S. Military Government (OMGUS), in its efforts to rebuild and re-educate Germany after World War II, chose to develop Germany's postwar broadcasting system in the public, not private, domain. OMGUS decided a heavily subsidized press was the best way to ward off special interests, which included capital interests, and didn't view public broadcasting as a means of government control (Troger, 2012). OMGUS "did not leave information media to market interests only, but ensured that they represented 'voices of reason' rather than 'voices of profit'" (Troger, 2012). While the circumstances differed vastly from those in the domestic United States, OMGUS's media policy in postwar Germany shows U.S. acceptance of a government-supported free press.

**Public broadcasting model.** Perhaps the most notable precedent for government funding of news in the United States is public broadcasting. Congress created the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) in 1967 as the federal government's primary investment in public media, with the goal of ensuring that everyone had access to high-quality, non-commercial media content. CPB provides funding to public broadcasters, including the national public-media outlets, National Public Radio (NPR) and Public

Broadcasting Service (PBS). The U.S. government spends less than \$450 million a year on public media, say Nichols and McChesney (2009), who argue that it should be closer to \$10 billion based on what other democratic countries spend. Pickard et al. (2009) suggest that with additional funding, even just \$5 per person, U.S. public media could become a core institution for journalism, much like the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation or the British Broadcasting Corporation. Almiron-Roig (2011) also notes that there is some support in the U.S. for full funding of a public model like in Europe.

McLoughlin and Gurevitz (2013) examine the federal government's role in supporting the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Supporters of public broadcasting defend government funding, saying it makes in-depth news accessible to everyone (McLoughlin & Gurevitz, 2013). Federal appropriations for CPB have consistently increased since 1969 — with a few exceptions, according to the CPB's website, including the late 1990s, the recession of 2008, and 2013. McLoughlin and Gurevitz (2013) argue that the upward funding trend suggests a demand for public broadcasting. However, some lawmakers have raised concerns about the federal budget, the government's role in funding public media, and public broadcasting's effectiveness in covering national news (McLoughlin & Gurevitz, 2013). The researchers discuss Congress's reluctance to continue to fund public broadcasting (McLoughlin & Gurevitz, 2013), which does not bode well for newspapers that might seek federal subsidies.

Expecting the government to expand the public broadcasting model to newspapers might be a challenge when public media have struggled to demonstrate a strong commitment to local news. Jensen (2011) says public broadcasting's predicament can be summed up in a single photo opportunity: A congressman makes an argument outside the

Capitol for continued funding of public broadcasting as a means to bolster local journalism — as he stands beside stuffed Muppets. “The public interest community wants public media to rescue serious journalism. But in public television, at least, Big Bird is the big draw” (Jensen, 2011). Jensen (2011) says news is a tough sell for public television, which prefers safe, noncontroversial programming. Local stations have traditionally rejected attempts at producing national news programs, claiming it infringes on localism (Jensen, 2011). Furthermore, PBS faces structural obstacles to increasing news content: The fact that its board members come from local stations of various sizes makes it hard to reach consensus on programming solutions; stations that produce national shows pay less in dues to PBS than those that produce local content; and national news shows refuse to weave in local news from member stations, a technique that has benefited NPR (Jensen, 2011). Jensen (2011) acknowledges that public radio has done better than public television at delivering public-interest journalism.

### **Other Options for Government Support**

Even better than the public broadcasting model, say Pickard et al. (2009), Congress should create a long-term trust that would protect public media from lawmakers’ political whims. If that isn’t feasible, federal funding could be provided through a national endowment for journalism, similar to National Endowment for the Arts or the National Endowment for the Humanities, which would provide grants to journalists and news organizations (Pickard et al., 2009). This proposal is unlikely to be free from political meddling, however, as NEA and NEH appropriations have fluctuated significantly over the years. Similar to a national endowment, a fund could be created with money the FCC already collects from telecom users, broadcast licensees, or Internet

service providers, and news organizations would compete openly for grants (Almiron-Roig, 2011). Alternatively, Pickard (2013) suggests that because public broadcasting traditionally has enjoyed high levels of public support, the federal government could triple its funding for the CPB to increase its capacity and its reach and to strengthen public media operations by developing new technology. Another option Pickard et al. propose is for the federal government to fund fellowships for journalists in training, similar to the Teach for America program, where fellows would have an opportunity to do watchdog reporting with a news organization (2009).

Greenberg (2012) explores two subsidy approaches to saving newspapers: direct government funding and indirect funding from tax benefits. He stresses that, while subsidies for private industries tend to be unpopular, there is a strong public interest in propping up newspapers, specifically to preserve local and investigative reporting (Greenberg, 2012). He recommends Congress opt for a combination of direct funding and tax-based incentives, which would involve a national public newspaper with local partner papers that would be converted to tax-exempt entities (Greenberg, 2012).

### **Government Influence**

**Press freedom.** Although the U.S. press remains one of the freest in the world, its freedom is declining as a result of traditional news media's financial struggles, diminished coverage of local news, difficulty supporting investigative journalism, and the public's waning trust in polarized and partisan news media, according Freedom House's Freedom of the Press report (2017). Furthermore, President Donald Trump's hostility toward the principles of press freedom raise concerns about the media's ability to hold the government accountable, as Trump's attacks on the media mirror actions in other

countries where press freedom has suffered (Freedom House, 2017). Freedom House does not assess specifically how government subsidies affect press freedom, but it does offer a few warnings: Russia and China, which have vast state-owned media systems, are making concerted efforts to exert greater control over the press; Hungary's media ownership is shifting toward government allies; and, similar to the situation in the U.S., Poland's government is attempting to delegitimize the press (Freedom House, 2017). On the other hand, a number of countries with substantial media subsidies rate very high for press freedom. For example, Sweden — which has one of the most generous systems for distributing newspaper subsidies (Ots, 2013) — ranks No. 2 in the world for press freedom (Freedom House, 2017). The U.S. ranks No. 33 (Freedom House, 2017). Clearly, the United States' brand of free speech, with an emphasis on freedom from the government, isn't the only type of freedom the press needs to serve its function in a democracy (Craft, 2010).

**Subsidies' impact on journalism.** Not all subsidies are equal, though. Wellbrock and Lerach (2013) caution that some types are better for journalism than others. The researchers created a quantitative model for a regional newspaper monopolist, common in Western countries, to examine the effectiveness of press subsidies. They were concerned with subsidies' impact on quality: truth and accuracy, relevance, neutrality, impartiality, immediacy, and diversity (Wellbrock & Lerach, 2013). As a result of their analysis, they warn against the widely used per-copy subsidy. While they found it increases profits and encourages new entrants in the market, journalistic quality suffers when the incentive is to sell more papers. Instead, they advocate for quality-related subsidies, which best

support the quality of journalism if the newspaper has a monopoly in the market, which is true of many community papers (Wellbrock & Leroch, 2013).

**Government control of corporate media.** Besides subsidies' impact on quality, a prevailing concern is the potential for government influence in news construction. However, it's noteworthy that the U.S. government already exerts some control over a free-market press. This control can be exercised through government narratives that influence news construction, or it can be employed through measures that hinder journalists' access to government information.

Regarding news construction, Bennett and Livingston (2003) identify two schools of thought: On one hand, breakthroughs in technology might allow journalists to cover more news events live rather than relying on government narratives. On the other hand, audience fragmentation and reduced focus on hard news might give the government more control over political messages. Rather than argue one extreme or the other, Bennett and Livingston (2003) suggest the truth lies in the middle, that journalists are semi-independent of the government. The researchers offer Iraq war coverage as an example: Journalists scrutinized government misjudgment about aspects of the war while also celebrating being embedded with the U.S. military during the war (Bennett & Livingston, 2003).

Craft (2010) notes that the press is dependent on the very people whom, as a watchdog, it is responsible for holding accountable. "A heavy reliance on official sources in reporting means that journalists may not feel — or really be — free to pursue stories that might alienate those sources" (Craft, 2010, p. 46). Carlson and Cuillier (2017) warn about attempts from government sources to manipulate the press. In a gatekeeping study

using surveys of reporters and public information officers (PIOs), they found that journalists felt increasing pressure from government PIOs, especially from federal agencies, to control the message. It is unclear, though, whether this was a product of the Obama administration — the surveys were conducted in 2012 — or if results would be similar regardless of who controlled the White House (Carlson & Cuillier, 2017).

**Government control of federally supported media.** While the federal government already uses tactics to amplify its agenda in the press, federal funding could give it more ammunition. Kirtley (2005), a critic of government-supported news, cites a federal appeals court ruling that broadened the interpretation of the high court’s *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* decision. The appeals court ruled that school-sponsored censorship of student newspapers, in the event that it advanced educational goals, applied not just to elementary and secondary schools but also to public universities. If the government can restrict speech in university media, “what happens when the government subsidizes the press?” Kirtley asks (2005). Jensen (2011) provides another example of government heavy-handedness: Dissatisfied with a 1970 PBS documentary, *Banks and the Poor*, that criticized Congress’s relationship with exploitative banks, the Nixon administration reorganized the CPB, which shifted federal funds away from PBS and toward the local stations.

McChesney (2012) acknowledges that political meddling is typical in U.S. public broadcasting, but he argues that it is not tolerated in plenty of other countries that have press subsidies. While journalism is still in crisis in some of these nations, McChesney says, they show that public subsidies are compatible with a successful democracy (2012).



## **Press Subsidies Overseas**

Despite an assumption that large government subsidies would threaten the democratic functions of the press, comparative studies of news coverage suggest otherwise. Benson (2011) conducted a comparative analysis of 1990s and 2000s immigration coverage in seven leading newspapers in France and eight of their U.S. counterparts. His rationale for studying immigration coverage was that the issue provoked heated debate in both countries during that time. He found that the French newspapers, which receive substantial government subsidies, were far more critical of government and other powerful organizations than the U.S. newspapers. Benson concluded that the French papers tend to be more “multiperspectival” than U.S. papers, allowing for a wider range of viewpoints and voices (2011, p. 315). Similarly, Dimitrova and Stromback (2006) found that subsidized newspapers in Sweden produced more substantive political coverage than newspapers in the U.S. The researchers compared frames in election coverage of newspapers in both countries, finding that U.S. articles tended to frame politics as a game, whereas the Swedish coverage was more issue oriented and analytical. Dimitrova and Stromback (2006) noted that journalistic bias is rarely a criticism of Swedish news media, yet it is a major concern for U.S. media.

Benson (2011) thinks he knows why the U.S. press produces lower-quality journalism: The United States’ preferred style of journalism — a narrative approach that focuses on people more than ideas — is driven by advertiser pressure to reach the broadest possible audience. Government-subsidized media aren’t influenced by the same commercial interests. States Benson:

French (and other European) debate-oriented journalism, funded in part by the state, serves the interests of political elites in a pluralist democracy seeking a relatively open forum through which to articulate their positions, criticize their opponents, and mobilize their supporters. (2011, p. 317)

In Nordic countries, governments see it as their obligation to provide high-quality news media, which Ohlsson (2015) says might not exist if left to the free market. Ohlsson (2015) attributes Nordic media markets' success — measured by quantity of content, reach, and different demographic subsets' information levels — to sustained economic growth combined with high levels of government support to offset market forces' negative effects.

The media of these countries have traditionally been characterized by strong newspaper markets (and widespread newspaper readership), intimate ties between the press and the political sphere, and an active state, resulting in extensive support systems for struggling newspapers and strong public service broadcasters. (Ohlsson, 2015, p. 58)

Even with the Nordic newspaper industry in turmoil — advertising revenue is sinking, newspaper ownership is concentrating, and government financial support is declining — public service continues to stand out in the region's media system (Ohlsson, 2015).

While media subsidy schemes vary among the Nordic countries, direct, selective subsidies have a long tradition in the region (Ohlsson, 2015). Whereas general subsidies apply to all newspapers, selective subsidies apply only to those that meet certain criteria (Schweizer et al., 2014). In the Nordic countries, this type of subsidy was introduced in the newspaper industry around 1970 to stave off local monopolies. Norway, long

characterized by high levels of government support to the press and also ranked No. 1 in the world for press freedom (Freedom House, 2017), was the first to introduce this type of selective newspaper subsidy in the form of grants for second newspapers in a market, as well as small, low-circulation papers (Ohlsson, 2015). Overall, direct subsidies account for about 2 percent of the Norwegian press's revenue, with some newspapers receiving a far bigger share than others (Ohlsson, 2015).

Nielsen and Linnebank (2011) note that all developed democracies — even the United States, with its free-market ideology — depend on government press subsidies. In their comparative review of subsidized media in six countries — Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States — the researchers identified three models of support: Finland, Germany, and the U.K. have a dual model, giving public media a large amount of license fee funding and offering substantial indirect subsidies for private news outlets (in Germany, government funding constitutes 46 percent of broadcast industry revenue). France and Italy have a mixed model, combining funding for public media with indirect and direct subsidies for private media (in Italy, government funding constitutes 18 percent of broadcast revenue). And the United States stands alone with a minimalist model, with low subsidies for public media and low indirect subsidies for private media (government funding constitutes just over 1 percent of broadcast revenue). The researchers conclude that total government subsidies for the media are more widespread than tends to be assumed — although they're decreasing — and that often, the scope of the subsidies is opaque, with indirect subsidies subject to especially minimal scrutiny (Nielsen & Linnebank, 2011).

In the debate about subsidies for U.S. newspapers, perhaps fears of unwelcome government influence stem from notions of a state-owned press. In Russia, for example, where government press subsidies are widely accepted and even encouraged, the majority of subsidies go to newspapers that are state-owned or that are openly loyal to the government (Makeenko, 2013). Russian subsidies are not successful in supporting pluralism, an objective of many governments that subsidize their countries' press; instead, Russian press subsidies minimize diversity of viewpoints (Makeenko, 2013). Also worthy of concern are subsidy schemes that lack transparency. Greece (Papathanassopoulos, 2013), Bulgaria (Kantchev & Ognyanova, 2013), and the U.K. (Baines, 2013) are examples of governments that deliver indirect subsidies to newspapers discreetly and gain influence over the press.

In other countries, transparent subsidy schemes might offer clues for the United States. In their analysis of Austria's press subsidy model, Murschetz and Karmasin (2013) note that the Austrian Press Subsidy Act is the subject of criticism as the government eyes reform. The concern, though, isn't whether subsidies should be cut — a report commissioned by the state media secretary recommended that subsidies should be increased to support the transition of print to digital media, and many observers are in favor of a bigger payout — but how they should be distributed in the digital age (Murschetz & Karmasin, 2013). Critics of the current subsidy scheme call for reform that rewards fairness, transparency, innovation, and accuracy (Murschetz & Karmasin, 2013). Eligibility requirements are fairly strict already. For example, newspapers must provide political, economic, and cultural news; at least half the content must be generated by the newspaper's own editorial staff; the price of the paper must be competitive for the

market; and newspapers must meet minimum distribution and journalism staffing requirements. As a means to promote quality and sustainability of the press, the government also reimburses publications for the cost of employing and training young, full-time journalists and foreign correspondents; offers financial incentives to associations and publishers that promote the reading of newspapers in schools; and helps fund media-sector research. Murschetz and Karmasin (2013) briefly address the effectiveness of the public subsidies, suggesting they might be key to preventing the death of low-circulation newspapers, but their analysis of effectiveness addresses only quantity of newspapers, not quality.

While it's necessary to acknowledge that some countries have press subsidy schemes that invite government interference, the success of schemes in other nations suggest that fears that subsidies would threaten democracy are unfounded, so long as the subsidies are transparent. Simply put, subsidies do not discourage responsible journalism (Benson, 2011).

### **Attitudes about the Press**

**Trust in the U.S. news media.** Persuading taxpayers to support newspapers, though, could be difficult at a time when trust in journalism is low and the president of the United States regards the news media as “the enemy of the American People” (Trump, 2017). According to Gallup polling, the percentage of people with high confidence in newspapers hit a record low in 2016, at just 20 percent (Swift, 2017). A Harvard-Harris poll from May 2017 found that 65 percent of voters believed the mainstream media published “a lot of fake news” (Easley, 2017). Public perceptions of news media’s credibility are poor. However, support appears to be warming up. In June

2017, Gallup reported a 7-point year-over-year spike in the percentage of people who had high confidence in newspapers (Swift, 2017). This coincides with a sharp increase in digital subscriptions to newspapers after the 2016 presidential election, even if it did little to offset total revenue losses (Barthel, 2017).

Metzgar and Hornaday (2013) explored public opinions of the news media using the Hutchins Commission as a framework. Through surveys of college-age media consumers, the researchers found that respondents were positive about the news media's ability to serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas (73.1 percent) and provide "a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day's events with appropriate context" (72.8 percent), but they were more negative about the media's performance in clarifying the values of society (42.1 percent) and presenting a representative picture of society (41.4 percent) (Metzgar & Hornaday, 2013, p. 261).

**Journalists' attitudes about their jobs.** Researchers have been studying journalists' work, attitudes, and values for decades. Most notable among this type of research are the American Journalist surveys, which began in 1971 and have been conducted about every 10 years (Willnat & Weaver, 2014). In the most recent of these studies, Willnat and Weaver (2014) found that journalists are less satisfied with their work and that they appear to believe journalism's reputation as the Fourth Estate is eroding. When asked about the "most important problem facing journalism today," journalists most often mentioned declining profits (20.4 percent), threats to the profession from digital media (11.4 percent), staff cuts and downsizing (11.3 percent), the need for a new business model and funding structure (10.8 percent), and hasty reporting (9.9 percent) (Willnat & Weaver, 2014). Willnat and Weaver (2014) suggest that some

findings, meanwhile, might indicate that journalists are exercising more cautious and ethical journalism: They are less likely to consider getting information to the public quickly as a very important role; they're more likely to place importance on investigating government claims; and they are far less willing to accept practices such as using confidential sources without permission, harassing sources, and paying for information (Willnat & Weaver, 2014).

Beam, Brownlee, Weaver, and Di Cicco (2009) used data from earlier American Journalist surveys, as well as their own surveys, to study journalists' attitudes about the public interest. They found that journalists took their public-service role seriously, with more than 90 percent saying it was quite important or extremely important that news organizations produce journalism that serves the public interest (Beam et al., 2009). However, they valued public service more than they believed their managers did (Beam et al., 2009).

Reinardy (2017) found a similar sentiment among journalists. When he asked nearly 100 newspapers workers to describe their papers' mission statements, a commitment to community service was practically universal (Reinardy, 2017). Reinardy found that while journalists, for the most part, agreed that their papers' social responsibility function was being met, they believed that staff reductions compromised it to some degree (Reinardy, 2017). Journalists still embraced the idea that the paper was an indispensable news source for the community, but they believed that the value readers placed on the paper had diminished, along with the news quality and quantity (Reinardy, 2017). A shrunken news staff resulted in spottier, less comprehensive coverage of the community, they believed (Reinardy, 2017).

Meanwhile, amid an influx of technology and digital platforms, journalists have suffered burnout (Reinardy, 2017). Despite staff cuts, newspaper newsrooms have continued to expand their products, adding websites, mobile apps, social media, and multimedia to their legacy offerings (Chyi & Tenenboim, 2017). As a result, role overload — when work demands surpass the time to complete the work — has been a key contributor to burnout and job dissatisfaction among journalists (Reinardy, 2017). In a 2014 survey, Reinardy (2017) found the number of journalists who said they worked differently than when they started their jobs jumped 15 percentage points since 2009; social media and Web initiatives contributed to more work, less time, working faster, and taking on multiple tasks and job titles.

Siegelbaum and Thomas (2016) interviewed journalists at U.S. newspapers about pressures they perceived to threaten their normative functions. Their study reveals that journalists are committed to the normative functions of the press but encounter hurdles to carrying out these functions (Siegelbaum & Thomas, 2016). Among the factors journalists cited to explain journalism's deteriorating condition were dwindling revenues, an antiquated advertising-subsidy model, failure to charge consumers for digital content, emerging technology such as smartphones, and the public's eroding trust in journalism (Siegelbaum & Thomas, 2016).

**Journalists' attitudes about subsidies.** Journalists have been asked about their public-interest roles and values, but because journalists execute newspapers' public-interest agendas, they should also be included in the debate about press subsidies. In Austria, whose federal government has had a press subsidy program since 1975, the government's media regulatory agency found in a 2006 study that most journalists and



newspaper publishers had positive attitudes about press subsidies (Murschetz & Karmasin, 2013). Publishers considered the subsidy a necessary tool to prevent market domination and appreciated a special subsidy that prevented a news monopoly in small markets, and journalists thought a press subsidy was necessary to support democratic principles and even suggested that the government should require subsidized newspapers to commit to a journalistic code of ethics (Murschetz & Karmasin, 2013).

In the United States, journalists and newspaper managers have historically had mixed feelings about government subsidies to newspapers. Bowers (1976) notes that as early as the 1940s, when Congress considered a plan to require the government to purchase war bond advertisements in local newspapers, industry leaders had conflicting views about whether newspapers should accept subsidies. Some trade publications opposed the measure, expressing concerns that the indirect newspaper subsidy would compromise newspapers' independence (Bowers, 1976). Although the bill was ultimately defeated, many newspaper groups and small newspapers welcomed the subsidy, and some balked at the idea that advertising could influence editorial content (Bowers, 1976).

Today, while there are vocal proponents of government subsidies for newspapers, their arguments often involve the notion that government subsidies are unpopular among journalists who fear it would undermine freedom of the press (McChesney, 2012; Nordenson, 2007). "To survive, journalism and journalists need to let go of their aversion to Uncle Sam," writes Nordenson (2007). But are journalists indeed averse to government subsidies? Scholars who have tackled the question of whether newspaper reform should involve government funding have typically favored theory over evidence-based research.

Further research should examine attitudes about government subsidies to fund news, whether public opinion or sentiment within the news industry.

### **Research Questions**

Assumptions about government influence over subsidized journalism raise questions about journalists' perceptions — not only of government influence but also of corporate influence, as consolidation trends have left most newspapers under the control of just a handful of media conglomerates. Testing the legitimacy of these assumptions, this study aims to answer three research questions:

RQ1: How have changes in the newspaper industry affected journalists' ability to serve the public interest?

The first research question provides a framework for answering the following:

RQ2: How do journalists perceive the influence newspapers' corporate governance has on their ability to serve the public interest?

RQ3: How do journalists think government financial support for newspapers might influence their ability to serve the public interest?

At a time when White House rhetoric is unsupportive of news media and Congress is looking for more programs to cut, including public broadcasting, government subsidies for newspapers might be a tough sell. Eventually, however, a shift in power in Washington or a deepening of the newspaper crisis could present an opportunity. In the meantime, understanding journalists' perspective is important if this model is to be considered as a viable option for newspaper reform.

### Chapter 3: Methods

Because the goal of this research is to understand journalists' perceptions, this study uses qualitative methods. Quantitative surveys can be used to study perceptions, but their purpose is to generalize among a large population (Creswell, 2014). Whereas quantitative research relies on precision and accuracy to determine validity and objectivity, qualitative research is interpretive and theoretical (Brennen, 2013). Qualitative research recognizes that reality is socially constructed and that there is a diversity of meanings (Brennen, 2013).

In an example of a quantitative study of journalists' perceptions, Beam et al. (2009) studied data from national surveys of journalists to determine their attitudes about public service in their profession. The surveys where they got their initial data were done about every 10 years starting in 1971, then the researchers selected a subset of respondents to re-interview in 2007, with the majority of the questions identical to the previous survey. This type of quantitative research allows scholars to code data and help explain behavior within categories they have already established (Brennen, 2013). The aim of this social-responsibility study, however, was not to identify trends in journalists' perceptions but to explore journalists' interpretations of corporate and government influence over journalistic values and processes. Qualitative research allowed for the discovery of themes after data were collected rather than a reliance on pre-established categories.

This multiple-case study focused on journalists at Oregon's four largest daily newspapers. Yin (1994) defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a

contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” Yin (1994) says a single-case study is most appropriate when a case is unusual or unique, whereas a multiple-case design is potentially regarded as more robust. Because the research questions in this study apply to newspaper journalists in a broad sense and not to a rare, specific case, a multi-case design is appropriate.

The cases in this study involve two national-conglomerate-owned newspapers and two family-owned publications. *The Oregonian* in Portland is owned by Advance Publications Inc., a privately held media conglomerate that operates more than 30 newspapers nationwide. The *Statesman Journal* in Salem is owned by Gannett Company Inc., a publicly traded conglomerate that operates more than 100 newspapers nationwide, including the national *USA Today* brand. *The Bulletin* in Bend is the flagship newspaper of Western Communications, a family-owned chain of seven community newspapers on the West Coast. And when this study began, *The Register-Guard* in Eugene was privately operated by RG Media Company, owned by a local family with no other news media holdings. However, the company announced in late January that it was being sold to GateHouse Media, a holding company for New Media Investment Group, controlled by the New York hedge fund Fortress Investment Group. GateHouse publishes more than 140 daily newspapers and more than 300 weekly newspapers. Interviews with *Register-Guard* journalists were conducted after the sale was announced but before GateHouse seized control of the newspaper March 1, 2018.

These four newspapers are Oregon’s largest based on daily circulation and the populations of the metropolitan areas they serve. Each publishes a daily print edition and

a news website and shares local news daily on social media platforms. Most news work is done locally, but *The Oregonian* and the *Statesman Journal* both use out-of-state production hubs, where design and copy editing functions are consolidated among multiple newspapers operated by their respective corporate parent. Conglomerate-owned newspapers are important to this study because conglomeration has shrunk opportunities for content creation on the local level (Greenberg, 2012; Pickard et al., 2009), which could have an impact on journalists' ability to serve the public interest. Including family-owned newspapers in the study was intended to allow for a more thorough examination of how economic forces influence public-interest decisions, as corporate governance issues would be expected to differ between large and small corporations.

This research focuses on newspapers in Oregon because the researcher lives there and has professional connections there. The state also features a mix of conglomerate-owned and family-owned metro and mid-size daily newspapers, an ideal sample for this study. Oregon has dozens of community newspapers that publish once or twice a week, but this study is limited to daily newspapers because journalists at Oregon's largest dailies are likely to experience similar processes and cultures and because the staffing levels at these papers tend to be larger, providing a better opportunity to recruit participants with diverse responsibilities.

Twelve semi-structured interviews, lasting about 30 minutes on average, were conducted between January 17 and February 16, 2018. Job titles varied considerably from paper to paper, so participants were categorized based on their job function. For the purposes of this study, a "manager" is an executive editor or managing editor; an "editor" is an assigning editor or section editor who oversees reporters; a "producer" is someone

whose job involves primarily copy editing, page design, or online editing or curating; and a “reporter” is someone who does newsgathering and writing and whose job title is reporter. The diversity of job functions prevented too narrow a focus on any particular professional role and introduced another variable that could be analyzed. Attempts were made to include visual journalists, such as photographers, but none responded to recruiting emails. Overall, participants consisted of two managers, two editors, four producers, and four reporters with a diverse range of experience working in news organizations (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Research Participants' Roles, Current Newspaper, Education, and Career History*

<u>Role</u>	<u>Newspaper Ownership</u>	<u>Education</u>	<u>Years at Paper</u>	<u>Total Years*</u>	<u>Current and Prior News Organizations</u>	<u>Roles in News Organizations</u>
Manager	Corporate	Bachelor's	30+	30+	Corporate-owned daily, PNW**	Copy editor, reporter, manager
Manager	Family	Bachelor's	30+	30+	Family-owned daily, PNW; weekly regional newspaper chain, PNW	Reporter, city editor, news editor, manager
Editor	Corporate	Bachelor's	13	30+	Corporate-owned daily, PNW; family-owned daily, PNW; wire service, national	Reporter, editor
Editor	Family	Bachelor's	3	24	Family-owned daily, PNW; corporate-owned daily, PNW; small weekly, PNW	Copy editor, clerk, reporter, editor
Producer	Corporate	Bachelor's	11.5	30+	3 corporate-owned dailies, PNW; 4 corporate-owned dailies, Midwest; corporate-owned daily, SE**; corporate-owned daily, NE; family-owned daily, SW	News compositor, graphic designer, page designer, copy editor, reporter, photographer, digital producer
Producer	Corporate	Bachelor's	1.5	2.5	Corporate-owned daily, PNW; corporate-owned magazine, national	Freelance writer, digital producer, social media specialist

Producer	Family	Bachelor's	15	15	Family-owned daily, PNW	Designer, systems manager, trainer
Producer	Family	Bachelor's	12	20	Family-owned daily, PNW; independent online newspaper, CA**	Copy editor, presentation/digital producer, managing editor
Reporter	Corporate	Master's	7	10	Corporate-owned daily, PNW; public radio station, PNW	Reporter
Reporter	Corporate	Bachelor's	3	5	Corporate-owned daily, PNW; college paper, PNW	Reporter
Reporter	Family	Bachelor's	2	18	2 family-owned midsize dailies, PNW; family-owned small daily, PNW; corporate-owned daily, CA	Reporter, multimedia journalist, sports editor
Reporter	Family	Bachelor's	0.5	2	Family-owned daily, PNW; small family-owned-turned-corporate daily, Midwest; news service, Midwest	Copy editor, page designer, reporter

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Note: Unless otherwise designated, “daily” refers to a metro or midsize newspaper. Specificity is avoided to protect participants’ confidentiality. Because only one metro paper is included in this study, identifying the newspaper’s size could result in deductive disclosure.

\*Total years = years working in news organizations; \*\*PNW = Pacific Northwest; SE = Southeast; NE = Northeast; SW = Southwest; CA = California



In many instances, the researcher gained access to participants through mutual acquaintances. After the acquaintance made initial contact with the journalist, the researcher sent the candidate a recruiting email. In other cases, participants were selected based on their job titles and email addresses listed in staff directories on their newspapers' websites. Interviews were intended to be conducted in person, arranged individually in a place the participant found quiet, comfortable, and convenient, as advised by Brennen (2013). However, after a number of requests for in-person interviews were declined or ignored, the researcher introduced the prospect of using video calling or telephone as an alternative (see Appendix A for the recruitment email). Nine participants were interviewed via telephone at their request, with some citing convenience; two interviews were conducted via Skype video-calling software; and one was conducted in person. Participants were encouraged to choose a neutral location to participate in the interview, away from the newsroom and the pressures of the job, so they would have freedom to speak candidly. The in-person interview took place in a meeting space in the participant's newsroom, per the journalist's choice.

Semi-structured interviews are based on pre-established questions asked to all participants but followed up by additional questions that seek more depth or clarification (Brennen, 2013). This approach ensured consistency in the questions participants were asked but allowed the researcher flexibility to create a conversational dialogue rather than a mechanical interrogation. The researcher adhered to the predetermined questions for the most part but sometimes asked for clarification or elaboration and even occasionally rephrased a question to facilitate a participant's understanding or to encourage the participant to think about the question in a different way.

Because it couldn't be expected that all participants would have prior knowledge of some of the concepts they were being asked to consider, participants were given background information for some questions. For example, the first question they were asked was how they thought public-interest journalism should be funded. Before the question was posed, they were given a few examples of funding proposals that have been considered. Before they were asked to discuss their thoughts about existing government subsidies for newspapers, they were given examples of subsidies their newspapers already receive. Participants were also asked questions such as how their news work had changed over the course of their careers, whether they thought additional government financial support would bolster or threaten their newspapers' ability to produce journalism that serves the public interest, and how much prior consideration they had given to government-supported journalism (see Appendix B for the complete list of interview questions).

The researcher brought to this study a perspective rooted in her experience working at Gannett-owned newspapers. She began her journalism career as a copy editor at the *Statesman Journal* in Salem in 2001, when a recession, along with increased competition from websites serving advertisers, forced hiring freezes and cuts. Despite what turned out to be the brink of a long-term downward spiral for newspapers, she perceived the *Statesman Journal* to have a moderate degree of journalistic autonomy from Gannett's corporate executives. She later worked for two other Gannett newspapers before returning to the *Statesman Journal* in 2015. A few months prior to her return, as part of her Missouri School of Journalism coursework, she conducted a small, informal ethnography of the *Statesman Journal's* organizational culture, observing a newsroom

whose decision-making was married to a corporate-mandated value system that emphasized metrics and audience-building. Also evident was staff's apprehension about impending job cuts, as Gannett was forcing all newsroom employees to reapply for a reduced number of positions. It's no wonder that upon returning to the newsroom as a part-time producer, the employee experienced burnout almost immediately. Staffing limitations, an unmanageable workload, and news decisions driven by audience metrics impeded her ability to prioritize the public interest. The researcher is aware of a potential bias present as a result of her history, and she took care to avoid letting it cloud her interpretations of this study's data. She did draw on her experience at the *Statesman Journal* to arrive at some of her interpretations, which will be discussed further in the *Limitations and Further Research* section of Chapter 6.

A benefit of the researcher's experience is that it helped guide the direction of the research and informed the interview questions. Because she still had personal relationships with some journalists at the *Statesman Journal*, as well as some of the other newspapers in this study, those journalists were excluded from this study. Backyard research, which can involve studying a researcher's own friends, may compromise the researcher's ability to disclose information and may raise questions about accuracy (Creswell, 2014). At different points in the past 12 years, the researcher worked in the same newsroom simultaneously with two of the participants, but she did not have a personal relationship or a close professional relationship with either of them.

Promises were made to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants so that their personal data would not be shared with individuals uninvolved in this research and identifying information would not be disclosed. Of concern was participants'

potential fear of retaliation for speaking candidly about their employers. The names of newspapers were omitted from most references to individual participants. Exceptions were made in circumstances where a newspaper's identity was necessary for context. In most cases, reporters' and editors' beats were also not identified in the findings of this research. The interviews were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed; personally identifying information was not included in the transcripts (see Appendix C for the complete interview transcripts).

The researcher reviewed the transcripts several times, identifying codes that emerged in the interviews. Per Creswell's (2014) advice, codes were then used to generate several major themes encompassing multiple perspectives from participants. Themes were analyzed within cases and across all cases, and a number of subthemes were also identified. The analysis was designed to answer two research questions that were determined at the onset of this study: How do journalists perceive the influence newspapers' corporate governance has on their ability to serve the public interest (RQ2), and how do journalists think government financial support for newspapers might influence their ability to serve the public interest (RQ3)? An additional research question — how have changes in the newspaper industry affected journalists' ability to serve the public interest? (RQ1) — emerged after the data were collected and coded because it became apparent that answering this question would provide a framework for answering the others.

## Chapter 4: Findings

Upon analysis of interviews with journalists about their news work, the public interest, and influence from stakeholders, six major themes emerged: how the newspaper industry has transformed, options for saving public-interest journalism, perceptions of government support for newspapers, pressure for journalists to appease financial stakeholders, journalism as a public good, and the threat of government support versus the threat of corporate ownership. Each of these major themes corresponds to at least one of the two research questions this study aims to answer (See Table 2).

Table 2

### *Research Questions and Corresponding Major Themes*

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<u>Research Question</u>	<u>Corresponding Major Themes</u>
<b>RQ1:</b> How have changes in the newspaper industry affected journalists' ability to serve the public interest?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Newspapers' transformation</li></ul>
<b>RQ2:</b> How do journalists perceive the influence newspapers' corporate governance has on their ability to serve the public interest?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Newspapers' transformation</li><li>• Saving public-interest journalism</li><li>• Pressure to appease stakeholders</li><li>• Government vs. corporate</li></ul>
<b>RQ3:</b> How do journalists think government financial support for newspapers might influence their ability to serve the public interest?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Perceptions of government support</li><li>• Pressure to appease stakeholders</li><li>• Journalism as a public good</li><li>• Government vs. corporate</li></ul>

### **Newspapers' Transformation**

Asked to describe how their news work has changed over time, how economic factors are related to these changes, and how these changes affect their ability to serve the public interest, journalists described news processes and coverage that have evolved

dramatically over the past 10 years or so. Many of these changes were attributed to economic factors that have pinched the newspaper industry.

**Newspapers in crisis.** Every journalist interviewed indicated some degree of a problem in the newspaper industry, ranging from annoyance about economic constraints to disdain for publishers' management. Most conveyed details of a crisis characterized by a sharp decline in newsroom resources, an elusive revenue stream, and deteriorating coverage. A number of journalists even expressed doubts or fears about newspapers' survival. Only two of the 12 described changes to their news work in a way that was not indicative of a crisis. Both were journalists who had no professional newspaper experience before they started working for Gannett within the past three years. A third entry-level journalist said her work hadn't changed during her six months in her job at a family-owned newspaper. But having worked previously for a newspaper that was acquired by the hedge-fund-owned GateHouse, she was acutely aware of the dire nature of the newspaper industry.

***Fighting for survival.*** "The worst thing that could happen is that we would go away," said an editor at a family-owned paper who stressed that adequately funding newspapers is critical to the public interest. A manager in another family-owned newsroom put it this way:

The fear is that if there isn't enough revenue to continue to keep a newsroom alive, that there will be communities that have no major news outlet to rely on. And so there's a huge, huge problem that looms out there for not just newspapers but communities who could be facing life without a community newspaper, and

that could strike a blow not just to the ability to get news and information but democracy itself.

But many journalists were not confident that newspapers would necessarily stay afloat. “I think you’d be hard-pressed to find a newspaper that says things are going to change anytime soon,” said a reporter at *The Register-Guard*, a family-owned paper that announced just days earlier that it was being purchased by GateHouse. “Dire straights” is how a reporter at a corporate-owned newspaper characterized the industry. “Fighting for our life” was a producer’s description of a family-owned newspaper that was “very profitable” just 15 years ago.

Short of the demise of newspapers altogether, the *Register-Guard* reporter cited another concern: the continuation of a trend in which newspaper ownership is increasingly consolidated among a handful of large companies: “You have fewer and fewer organizations in the role of ownership; you’re going to have less and less voices.”

***Reasons for crisis.*** While the reasons for newspapers’ crisis are likely complex and nuanced, a few explanations emerged in interviews with journalists: the transition from print to digital news platforms, management decisions, and waning trust in journalism.

***Digital transition.*** The big question of how to fund digital journalism hasn’t been sufficiently answered, and some journalists attributed the crisis to this ongoing problem. One reporter noted that the industry remains in peril despite overall economic improvements on a national level, “really because of the digital situation.” One reporter at a corporate-owned newspaper stated it more bluntly: After digital innovators such as Craigslist, Google, and Facebook disrupted newspapers’ traditional advertising model,

“no one can seem to pull their heads out of their asses and figure out how to make it work online.”

And while the revenue conundrum is an internal struggle, the newspaper industry faces an external struggle in the digital age, as well: the proliferation of other information sources online. These sources can be confused with professional journalism, said a producer at a family-owned newspaper: “So, lots of bloggers, lots of, I would say, less qualified individuals, less vetted individuals supplying information to the community, in competition with us but not necessarily on a level playing field.”

*Management decisions.* The crisis in the newspaper industry is “largely of our own making,” said the reporter who blamed publishers for their inadequate response to Craigslist, Google, and Facebook. This reporter placed much of the blame squarely on corporate management, whose decisions he said have inhibited potential for innovation and revenue growth. “We poisoned our brand through terrible decisions by management — our corporate management to be clear, not local editorial management,” he said about his employer. The publisher could have generated more revenue by embracing digital subscriptions or other models that relied on support from news consumers, he said, and the newspaper’s marketing team could have done more to promote the good work its journalists produced. Another reporter said that’s an approach she’s already seeing from other news organizations: a push to explain to readers how their support helps fund the journalism they want to read. Getting people to pay for the news they consume is “at the root of all of these problems that so many companies are having right now,” yet another reporter said.



Other journalists discussed not how management decisions have prevented growth but how their revenue focus has diluted public-interest journalism. After all, “some of the onus does have to fall on the news organization to profit,” said a producer at a corporate-owned newspaper. But “the more economic constraints you have, the less money and resources you have to dedicate to journalism,” and that necessarily affects the quality of the journalism, a reporter said.

A number of journalists cited quality as an important characteristic of newspaper work. A producer — whose copy editing role traditionally has been seen as one of quality control — explained that one way quality is achieved is to “work with a story and massage it and make it better.” A few journalists stressed that their newspapers continued to produce high-quality work despite pressures that tend to suppress quality.

An editor at a family-owned newspaper said dubious management decisions she observed when working in corporate media are what led her to take a job at a smaller newspaper:

It used to be that your progression was to go to a bigger and bigger paper, but what I came to realize is those bigger papers weren’t necessarily doing the best that they can do; they were doing with what they could survive with.

She said she believes the family-owned newspaper where she works now has prioritized what she believes a nonprofit might also prioritize: “the news product that we produce.”

*Waning trust in journalism.* In discussing the state of the newspaper industry, a few journalists even cited consumers’ attitudes: Some people don’t trust the media. “The source to trust” is how one reporter described the reputation he wanted his newspaper to have. Some journalists stressed the importance of this in the face of “the rhetoric around

fake news,” as one reporter put it. An editor lamented that some information sources today sow doubt, neglect opposing perspectives, or bend the truth. “I just think that makes traditional newspapers more important,” she said. Truth-telling, accuracy, and fairness remain key principles of newspapers, the journalists indicated.

One editor said distrust and the perception of bias drive readers away from newspapers:

People, I think, in the world that we live in have a tendency to read into what they want of the story regardless of your protestations and examples and practices to the contrary. And they’ll find something online or in another publication that speaks more clearly to their political point of view. So instead of actually doing research or trying to find out what’s happening from a mainstream media source, there are more and more people who are finding other outlets that feed their worldview.

**Changing news work.** Changes journalists have experienced in their work, both recently and over the long term, have stemmed from developments such as the transition to digital production, a revolutionized relationship with the audience, and bleak financial circumstances. Journalists were asked whether the changes they’ve experienced have helped or hindered their ability to serve the public interest. Journalists characterized most changes as having a negative impact on the public interest, but many journalists identified positive changes, as well.

***Change as negative.*** Seven subthemes emerged when journalists described how changes to news work have damaged their ability to serve the public interest: shrinking staff, more work, less coverage, immediacy, chasing clicks, legal challenges, and morale.

*Shrinking staff.* A dramatic reduction in the size of newsroom staff was described at each of the four newspapers studied. This “has changed everything,” said a newsroom manager whose staff has been slashed by “well over half” in his three decades at the newspaper owned by his family.

Many other journalists described how turnover or layoffs have affected the work that they do. Most commonly, journalists described inheriting more work, but they also described how their existing work changed. “Basically, every time there’s a layoff, people who have multiple skills in our room are called upon to do additional things or to stop doing old things and start doing new things,” said a producer at *The Oregonian*, which laid off 11 journalists just a few days earlier. A reporter at another newspaper described a massive and swift staff purge at a Midwest newspaper she had worked for once it was acquired by GateHouse:

While I was able to get out in time, I saw the way that being bought by this other company affected the people who are still there and the people who’ve left. So that newsroom is now half the size that it was when I started there two years ago.

In many cases, when a newspaper experiences cuts, departing journalists’ responsibilities are absorbed by remaining staffers. One reporter described how at a previous newspaper he worked for, a crime reporter’s position was filled not by hiring a replacement but by rotating existing reporters into the job for a week at a time. So every six weeks, he’d have two jobs to do. “As you play the musical chairs, there’s still a lot to do, and you have less time to do it,” he said. And not only does reduced staffing mean fewer positions, but it also means fewer staff hours, and that means more work for other journalists to absorb. “When someone runs out of hours, you have to pick up their work

here and there,” said a producer whose corporate-owned newspaper is strict about overtime. A reporter at the same newspaper attributed the crackdown on overtime hours to an austere budget.

Not all job losses have been a result of reductions in the workforce; sometimes it’s a matter of eliminating one position in favor of creating a new one. But the result is still damaging to public-interest journalism, said an editor at a corporate-owned newspaper:

We’re having to hire people with other skills. We’re hiring video producers and videographers who can capture the visuals, but that necessarily means that there’s not a reporter who is providing the content for it. And that, I think, necessarily reduces the quality of the overall journalism and output of a newspaper, or media group, like we are.

Some journalists also said staff reductions limited their ability to pursue the journalism they thought was important. “It comes down to just not having enough time or resources at your disposal to do the work that really would be impactful,” stated a reporter at a corporate-owned newspaper who said he’s survived six or seven rounds of layoffs in as many years. “It’s frustrating when you’re feeling like you’re swimming upstream and you are only able to occasionally come up for air and do something that really resonates,” he said.

Some also described how staff cuts have coincided with consolidation, particularly of news production operations. A producer at a family-owned newspaper said her newsroom used to have separate copy desks for each section, but they’ve since merged. And an editor described how her corporate-owned newspaper’s centralizing

copy editing functions in an out-of-state hub has created a disconnect: She doesn't know the copy editors, and the copy editors don't know the city whose newspaper they're editing.

*More work.* Overall, journalists characterized staff reductions as a disadvantage, with inflated workloads and multitasking among the notable consequences. Some journalists also attributed these changes to their newsrooms' shifting focus to digital from print.

Two producers, in particular, described a substantial increase in work because, whereas they previously concentrated on one specialized skill or on one specific section of the newspaper, they now must pay attention to all parts of the newspaper, as well as the website and multimedia. An editor spoke of "a constant demand for not just doing one story but doing it several different ways," including "being part of the conversation through multimedia, through social media, which distracts you from doing the bigger stories that you want to do or you find to be more journalistically interesting and valuable to the readership."

The new demands also pose challenges for managing staff, one newsroom manager explained:

Reporters and editors and photographers, everybody involved in the newsgathering, now have to multitask and be able to do all kinds of things that they never had to do before. And so the job's more complicated. It's harder to train people. Morale is an issue because some people are good at multitasking, and others are not. And so the job has just become way more complex than it ever had to be in the old print days.

Several journalists also described how work that used to be done by a team of journalists now falls on the shoulders of one individual. “Before, there was much more of a shared experience and a team that would help produce the story,” said an editor, who explained how a story that previously might have been produced by several journalists with specialized skills now involves just one reporter who also shoots photos and video and promotes the story on social media.

Ultimately, journalists are picking up the slack in the wake of layoffs and turnover. And sometimes it’s not because they’re told to; it’s because they choose to. “Even if you’re not asked to pick up more duties, I think it’s only human nature that people see a hole and want to fill it,” said a reporter at a corporate-owned newspaper. A reporter at another corporate-owned paper said the demand for reporters to shoot photo and video compelled her “to find ways to take it upon myself so that I’m increasing those skills.”

*Less coverage.* As workloads are increasing, the amount of coverage newsrooms produce is decreasing. Eight of the 12 journalists interviewed said they’ve seen their newspapers reduce the level of news coverage they provide. Many cited shrunken staffs. They said that their newspapers were becoming disconnected from the communities they served, that coverage had become less thorough, or that they had to make sacrifices, forgoing stories they would have liked to cover. One reporter said beats had become so expansive that “the best that a person can do covering that broad of a range of topics is just triage.” Another worried that reduced coverage could prevent her newspaper from fulfilling its watchdog role and holding institutions accountable.

Holding the powerful accountable was vital to many of the journalists interviewed. Eight of the 12 used the term “watchdog” when discussing newspapers’ responsibilities. One reporter described watchdog journalism as “the greatest role in how newspapers and media are so important,” and an editor said holding government agencies accountable “is one of the most important roles we as journalists play.” Most journalists discussed newspapers’ watchdog function as a given without elaborating on why it’s important. One newsroom manager, however, explained that newspapers are in a unique position to keep government in check:

Without any watchdog entity looking at what government’s doing, government could ultimately have a lot more power than it has today to do whatever it wants to do. And really, newspapers, news organizations, but I think primarily newspapers, have carried the load for that watchdog function. So if the watchdog function is gone, government could grow way more powerful. And that’s a scary thing for a lot of people.

As communities grow, the number of institutions for journalists to hold accountable presumably grows, as well — even as newsrooms are cutting back their coverage. All four Oregon cities served by the newspapers in this study have experienced population growth — Portland and Bend substantially (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). A journalist in Bend described how this dynamic has affected news coverage:

In the last 25 years, the population of our area has gone from 20,000 to 90,000. And so we’ve seen an, just an enormous growth in terms of our population. And our community has changed considerably. There’s so much more to cover. But in that same amount of time, our staffing levels have gone the other direction. So it

isn't just how we cover it; it's what we cover gets reduced. We have less people on the ground, paying attention to what's happening locally.

Sometimes coverage isn't sacrificed altogether; it's local or in-person coverage specifically that takes a hit. One editor said she relies a lot more on national wire content to fill her section even though "local is our bread and butter." Another editor explained how budgetary constraints have forced sports reporters to watch games on television rather than traveling to cover local teams directly.

The loss of local coverage was noted by most journalists, and many were concerned about the impact that had on their communities. "If you don't have as many people out there in the community, digging up stories, pounding the pavement, engaging, then your community starts to lose touch with your newspaper," one editor said. The result is local officials "don't all have a face to put to the name, and they don't know who to call to tell things, and then you don't have your whistleblowers who might call you," she explained. Meanwhile, newspapers lose touch with their communities, too. Journalists at *The Oregonian* discussed the loss of suburban coverage. "We're out of touch with those communities because we don't walk among them anymore," one said. And that's happening not just at the state's largest paper. A reporter at a smaller family-owned newspaper said reporters there are no longer being sent to outlying towns. "I think it's those really small communities that can be hurt the most by all these changes," he said.

Ultimately, readers are underserved when coverage is reduced, some journalists said. One reporter explained it this way:



That's another set of eyeballs that are not there. That's another person picking up the phone and calling and seeing what's going on downtown. That's just another set of feet not out pounding the pavement. And nobody benefits from that in terms of the community. ... It's a huge disservice to readers.

*Immediacy.* The speed of news delivery is another change a number of journalists noted. The traditional once-a-day print publishing schedule is no longer a reality, with technological advancements now allowing for digital news delivery 24 hours a day. Audience demand for immediate information has put pressure on journalists to deliver news quickly, and the newspapers in this study have adopted a digital-first workflow, meaning news is typically printed in the newspaper only after it's distributed online. Some journalists described how this demand for immediacy has harmed public-interest journalism. For one, journalists may sacrifice accuracy for speed. "With breaking news, it's more important to be fast than to be correct, whereas there used to be a period where getting it right was as important as being fast," a producer said. The demand for immediacy has also forced journalists to sacrifice thoroughness. An editor explained that journalists no longer have "the luxury" of thoroughly vetting a tip before reporting on it:

We get a tip, we want to be the first to post. Before, we'd be the first to publish, but we were on a publishing cycle that would give us, you know, 12 hours, maybe sometimes longer, to go to all our sources, bring in other reporters, you go to a house and track people down, find them on the phone, find them at their business. But now, we do that either by phone or we do it on the fly.

*Chasing clicks.* Publishers' focus on capturing audience attention online has sometimes resulted in what a reporter called "chasing clicks," favoring content designed

to draw online traffic or engagement, or “click-bait.” An emphasis on chasing clicks has changed the type of work journalists do to some degree. Sometimes, “we’re like a dog with a squirrel; we’ll go after whatever the latest hit parade is on the internet,” an editor said. One reporter said that for a while, that meant shooting more video, with the goal to be to “get to the fire when things are exploding, like blowing up, you know, something really dramatic, that will draw people to watch it.” That’s the type of content that gets viewers to click, he said.

The problem with chasing clicks, some journalists said, is that it detracts from public-service journalism. But it’s important because it’s a component of how employers evaluate reporters’ work. In addition to setting goals for story quantity and impact, managers also set goals related to internet traffic, leaving journalists to think not just about how their work is serving the public but also how it will be viewed by management, a reporter explained:

Will this be something that will resonate with our digital operations folks? ... Do they think this is something that will get a lot of play? ... That is a calculus that you face, and it’s not all the time, but it’s something that you think about.

*Legal challenges.* When asked whether economic constraints in the newspaper industry had a bearing on freedom of the press, some journalists noted that their newsrooms’ ability to fight legal battles or threaten litigation had weakened because of a leaner budget. An editor said journalists at her newspaper also request fewer public records now — “we used to request bundles of records” — because of the cost burden.

*Morale.* While this is not a change in their work, it’s worth noting that a decline in morale has afflicted some journalists, as well. In some cases, journalists explicitly stated

how morale has been affected, such as no longer being able “to do work that makes you feel really good,” a reporter said. In other cases, the impact on morale was clear based on how they talked about their jobs.

Two journalists at a family-owned newspaper referred to budget pressures that directly affected workers, such as getting paid late, having to take unpaid days off, receiving no health insurance, and not getting raises for several years. These factors have resulted in high turnover among newsroom staff, they said. They have also affected how journalists perform their jobs. A reporter described this experience after receiving an email notifying staff that paychecks would be issued late:

I am not doing a good job reporting the few hours after getting that because I’m stressed about ... do I have bills that are going to come out the next day, and am I going to make this work? And there’s just kind of the financial stresses that really do impact the time and energy that you can fully dedicate to doing your job.

The threat — or the reality — of layoffs also weighs on newspaper workers. An entry-level journalist at the Gannett-owned *Statesman Journal* hadn’t experienced a round of layoffs, but she said she and other young journalists were aware of the newspaper’s previous cuts, as well as staff reductions at other newspapers: “It’s just kind of consistent fear that that’s going to be us.” For others, watching colleagues lose their jobs takes a toll on morale. An *Oregonian* journalist who was interviewed for this study just days after his newsroom shed 11 positions said he was “fired up” and “everything is super raw right now.” He jokingly referred to the interview as therapy.

***Change as positive.*** Although journalists suggested many of the changes to their jobs had a negative impact on the public interest, some came with advantages. In some

cases, journalists identified positive changes immediately, whereas some declared that the changes were nothing but negative but later recognized some benefits. The following subthemes emerged when journalists described how changes to news work have helped them serve the public interest: access and immediacy, closer to the audience, and new opportunities.

*Access and immediacy.* Whereas some journalists discussed the disadvantages of a 24-hour digital news cycle, some touted its advantages. A newsroom manager suggested that the digital news cycle gives journalists more freedom because they are no longer tied to the old print model of news delivery. “In the event of breaking news, we can put it up immediately and send out an alert, and people have that information,” a producer/copy editor said. Not only is that an advantage for journalists, but it also benefits the public, which now has much quicker access to information — and much greater access, as well, said a reporter who characterized that change as positive.

*Closer to the audience.* Journalists used to think they knew what news mattered to readers, but thanks to social media and software that allow them to track audience behavior online, now they know what their audience actually wants. “Now I think we are less in our own echo chamber,” an editor said.

A reporter said the way her newsroom analyzes audience metrics has grown more sophisticated recently. Journalists can measure not just what content readers are viewing but how they’re using it — how much time they’re spending with it, how they’re accessing it, what additional content they’re viewing — which guides journalists’ decisions about how to best serve those readers, she said. A producer said the emphasis on the audience is in the public interest:

I'm very cognizant of how is this going to help the public, how will this impact the larger audience and the larger community around me. So, I think it puts more of an emphasis or stress on, kind of, making stories matter, and making news matter.

Besides just observing audience behavior, journalists are also able to more effectively communicate with their readers. Social media allows journalists to reach out to readers directly and to receive immediate feedback. "You find out more about a subject in more real time, and you have very immediate sources. With names, you can track people down a lot more easily," an editor said.

*New opportunities.* Although journalists overwhelmingly characterized an increased workload as having a negative impact on the public interest, there is a flip side. Some journalists identified new opportunities as a result of taking on additional responsibilities. A reporter said a bigger workload has forced him to work more efficiently:

Throughout it all, I have become very good at quickly synthesizing, you know, taking information and putting together stories. Probably some of my best skills as a reporter are breaking news.

Taking on extra responsibilities also liberates journalists from pro forma work and "helps you narrow your focus and go after the stories that you know are worthwhile and that are meaty and that will make a difference," an editor said. A producer said the additional responsibilities he's absorbed have allowed him "to get my hands into more storytelling ideas" and have a greater impact.

## **Saving Public-Interest Journalism**

In the midst of a revenue crisis, how to fund newspapers is a question many in the industry have pondered. Some journalists interviewed for this study said they'd given the question some thought; others were more concerned with maintaining quality journalism than with figuring out how to pay for it. Before any other questions were posed, each journalist was asked how public-interest journalism should be funded today and was given a few examples of proposals that have been considered: creating new revenue opportunities within the existing ownership model, operating newspapers as nonprofit or low-profit organizations with support from foundations and other donors, and accepting more money from the government. Some journalists suggested there was no good solution for funding public-interest journalism — not yet, at least. “I wish there was one. If there were, the industry wouldn't be in so much trouble,” a newsroom manager said. While nobody seemed confident they'd solved “the riddle of the Sphinx,” as that manager put it, most journalists identified some possibilities — none of them novel, however; all were models already being tried in the United States.

**Advertising and circulation.** There was some disagreement among journalists as to whether the traditional newspaper model was the best way to fund journalism in the digital age. Some were adamant that the status quo was no longer working. “I think we've all seen that corporations' funding news isn't going that well so far,” a reporter at a family-owned newspaper said. A producer at the same paper called advertising a “tried-and-true method” but acknowledged that it's no longer paying the bills. To compensate, some newspapers have experimented with new ways of generating revenue, such as

offering digital services and sponsoring events, said a manager at a family-owned newspaper. But he was unsure how successful those efforts could be.

He and other journalists believed newspapers should instead emphasize the other pillar of the traditional advertising-and-circulation model. Circulation is increasingly driving revenue at newspapers, he said, including his own. Circulation revenue can come from newspaper sales, or it can come from online subscriptions. A producer said the benefit of a subscription model is that the news is funded by consumers rather than by stakeholders who have an interest in controlling news production. An online subscription model, or a paywall, has benefited some newspapers, said an *Oregonian* reporter, who thought it was a mistake for his newspaper not to embrace it. “People will pay for quality enterprise and investigative reporting and local reporting that they feel they can’t get anywhere else,” he said. Another reporter — at a newspaper that does have a paywall — echoed that sentiment; although, she said the conundrum was that producing quality work requires more money.

**Public broadcasting.** One journalist who advocated for an online subscription model said the key was asking consumers to pay for their news. The reporter, who previously worked in public radio, said this could also be done by appealing directly to consumers through a pledge drive. A model like this, similar to public broadcasting, is more than a financial transaction; “you’re having more of an honest relationship with your readers or your listeners,” he said. Along the same lines, another reporter proposed doing away with the subscription model and instead converting it to a membership model — “not just semantics, but getting people to have this different feeling of, if I’m giving money, it’s not just, ‘Oh, I’m buying this thing, but I am supporting and being a part of

this community in some way.” Journalists who mentioned the public broadcasting model tended to be more interested in soliciting support from the public than in receiving money from the government, another source of revenue for public broadcasters.

**Grants and foundations.** A number of journalists said the shot in the arm newspapers need is a generous contribution by a wealthy benefactor or a foundation. Although there are many examples of foundation grants’ supporting journalism projects, a manager at a family-owned newspaper expressed concern that the funding was unstable. A producer at a corporate-owned paper said that while he believed a for-profit model was the most stable, adding foundation support could be beneficial. Other journalists weren’t convinced that a for-profit model was the most stable way to fund news. “If we had a stream of revenue that was not dependent on advertisers but rather on grants or some other kind of funding, then I think you’d be able to keep that consistency of local content,” said an editor at a family-owned newspaper. It’s important, though, that a foundation “supports press freedom even if the result of that reporting is something the people behind the foundation might not agree with,” said a reporter at the same paper.

**Nonprofits.** Another way foundations could be involved in funding journalism is through nonprofits, which some journalists said sounded promising. One reporter said she knew of investigative-reporting nonprofits that accept money from foundations and do some great work. A couple of journalists cited ProPublica. A reporter said he believed the nonprofit newsroom’s model was replicable and wasn’t sure why a similar model hadn’t succeeded in the Pacific Northwest. “I think it’s doable,” he said. ProPublica’s nonprofit status liberates it “to do really great investigation journalism that isn’t tied to having to meet a bottom line,” one editor said. That kind of liberation could prevent conflicts of



interest such as what you might see if a wealthy local family, for example, had a financial stake in a newspaper or if it were owned by a corporation, said an editor at a family-owned newspaper. Another reason a nonprofit might work, she said, is that a for-profit model fosters greed: “So, as a detriment of the newspaper and the quality of the newspapers and journalism, they will cut pay, cut people and not make producing quality products a priority.”

### **Perceptions of Government Support**

Journalists were asked several questions about possible government assistance in the financing of public-interest journalism. Their opinions about journalistic principles, the newspaper crisis, and changes to their jobs help make sense of their perceptions about government support.

**Uncharted territory.** When journalists were asked how public-interest journalism should be funded, they drew from their familiarity of models in existence in the United States. Perhaps they had trouble imagining a more innovative approach. Some journalists acknowledged as much when presented with the idea of accepting government money. About half of the journalists interviewed suggested that government-funded U.S. newspapers are hard to fathom. “It’s just not tradition,” one newsroom manager said.

Journalists were given a few examples of newspaper subsidies, but they were not told how these subsidies might be distributed or what they would entail. They were not presented with a proposed scheme for newspaper subsidies, as the aim of this study is to explore journalists’ perceptions about government support in general rather than to identify an avenue for providing it. Several journalists thought they needed more

information about how subsidies would be structured before they could form an opinion.

One reporter said:

Are we talking this is going to be 30 percent of your revenue is going to come from local or federal government? Or 40 percent? Or 50 percent? Or 10 percent? I guess I have a lot of questions about what that would look like.

Some journalists expressed fear of the unknown. “I think I’ve been kind of intrigued but also worried about the idea of exactly what truly government-funded journalism would look like,” a reporter said. Several journalists said they’d be leery of government financial support without having experienced it or without a better understanding of it. “I just can’t envision any scenario in which government support would be healthy,” a newsroom manager said. Two journalists also expressed concern that readers would not understand it and would question newspapers’ independence.

**State-run media.** When asking journalists about newspaper subsidies, the interviewer used the terms “government support,” “financial support,” and “government funding” (the word “subsidies” was not used). Although the journalists were never asked about government control or ownership of newspapers, seven of the 12 people interviewed introduced that idea. “State-run media,” “government owned” and “arm in the government” were some of the terms they used. One producer suggested government financial support for newspapers might amount to “the Oregon Department of News.” A newsroom manager referred to “a Big Brother government owning a big chunk of newspapers.” In only one case did a journalist who thought government support might mean government control ask for clarification rather than first jumping to a conclusion.

Journalists' interpretation of newspaper subsidies as state-run media underscores the fledgling nature of this concept in the United States.

**Limited familiarity.** Another indication that government subsidies have received little attention in the national conversation about how to fund newspapers is journalists' lack of familiarity with the concept. When asked how much they had thought about government-supported journalism prior to being interviewed for this study, eight of the 12 journalists said they had given it little or no consideration. When journalists were told that their newspapers received some government subsidies already — postal discounts, legal notices, and tax breaks for publishers were the examples given — five of them said they were unaware of at least some of those benefits. Several journalists said that while they knew newspapers received revenue from legal notices — some pointed out that the amount is declining — they hadn't thought about it as a subsidy or they declined to characterize it as such. "A legal ad is an advertisement. And it's just like any other advertisement. ... They're paying for a service," said a manager at a family-owned newspaper.

When journalists said they had given prior thought to newspaper subsidies, they referred to models they've already seen implemented. These included public broadcasting, college newspapers, government-sponsored news, and legal notices.

Five of the 12 journalists mentioned public broadcasting at some point during the interview, and four of them cited at least one example: NPR, PBS, CPB, or the U.K.'s BBC. An editor at a corporate-owned newspaper praised public broadcasting, saying it has "enriched my life." An entry-level reporter at a family-owned newspaper said she reads industry news regularly, including articles about journalism funding models. The

articles she's seen about government funding have focused on the idea of expanding public broadcasting. She said she thought public broadcasting was successful because it was well-established, and she appreciated its journalistic integrity:

They're large enough and have these structures in place to the point where, when there's that threat of removing funding from NPR and PBS earlier this year, they were able to report on it in a very, very clear, transparent way and continue that.

The same reporter also cited college newspapers as an example of government-supported journalism. But this model is not as stable as public broadcasting, in her view, because student government could revoke funding from the newspaper if student representatives disagreed with the news coverage. A producer at a corporate-owned newspaper argued that funding for public broadcasting can also be shaky, though. That will be discussed later.

Three of the 12 journalists mentioned news organizations funded or operated by government agencies or institutions. Two said they knew people who worked for Voice of America (VOA), the international broadcaster that falls under the U.S. government's Broadcasting Board of Governors. VOA, an American news source for international audiences, says it "exemplifies the principles of a free press" and boasts a code of ethics that emphasizes accuracy, balance, and objectivity (VOA Public Relations, n.d., para. 2). While one of the journalists, a reporter at a corporate-owned paper, said the people he knew were happy there, the other, an editor at the same paper, said she believes the VOA has limited influence, and she suspects that her friend worries about the stability of the government money that funds her job. A manager at that newspaper said she's thought a lot about government-sponsored news, as well, but on the local level. Her concern was

government-sponsored news entities created to bypass traditional media. She said her area's regional government and the local public medical school hired reporters "to cover their own meetings and put out their own news product and claim it's independent."

The same manager said she's also thought a great deal about legal notices because she was on the board of the Oregon press association and was involved in its effort to keep legal notices in newspapers during the foreclosure crisis. She noted that the state's smaller newspapers relied on those notices.

**Government weaknesses.** When discussing subsidies, half of the journalists interviewed raised concerns that the government might be incapable of providing stable funding for newspapers. They cited government's poor track record, partisan politics, and fears of government overreach.

A reporter who was highly critical of management decisions by his newspaper's corporate publisher was similarly critical about local and federal government: "We can't pave our streets. We can't figure out how to make affordable housing work. We can't fund our schools. ... We can't agree on a [federal] budget." He suggested newspapers wouldn't want to be another institution the government can't adequately support. At the same time, he acknowledged that newspapers are already inadequately supported by the private sector.

Instability as a result of partisanship or political whims also concerned the journalists. Five of the 12 people interviewed raised such a concern. The government could fund something for decades then suddenly politicize it and threaten to pull funding, said a producer at a corporate-owned newspaper. Congressional threats to pull federal

funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting are an example of this. The producer explained:

If you were to tell me that NPR or public television was being fully funded and nobody in Congress was trying to raise an issue about them every time Grover used a bad word, I'd be fine with that. I have no problem with that. I have problems with them saying, "We're going to give you this money, you can do what you want," and then the next week they come back and say, "No wait, don't do that," you know.

A producer at a family-owned newspaper said that securing government grants can be a lot of work and "can come and go based on the whims of whoever seems to be in charge at that particular time." And the threat of losing funding to political maneuvering can be a problem even on the local level; a local school board is an example of a government body that can become very political where public funds are involved, said a reporter at a family-owned newspaper.

An editor at a corporate-owned newspaper also raised concerns that subsidized newspapers might be susceptible to abuse of government power. She said the federal government has already crossed the line with journalists: "They wiretapped The Associated Press phone calls a few years ago. There have been some widespread abuses. They've tried to compel reporters to give testimony or give up notes." She said subsidies could also pose a problem for newspapers' audiences, who might perceive the financial support as the federal government's effort to control local media. Government overreach is already a flashpoint in Oregon, she said, pointing to the 2016 land-rights standoff

between the federal government and militants who seized control of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge:

Proponents want local control, local sheriffs, obviously, or county commissions to decide what to do with the land in their jurisdiction. And I kind of think ... that's the way a lot of people would think if the government had a major financial hand or control of the newspaper, that they would be under the thumb.

**Acceptance.** Most of the journalists interviewed accepted the idea of government support for newspapers, but few embraced it thoroughly. Eight of the 12 said they'd welcome newspaper subsidies, but half of those eight were leery. One, a reporter at a family-owned newspaper, initially rejected the idea, but after having given it some thought over the course of the interview and coming to understand that government support didn't necessarily mean government ownership, he was more agreeable. Of the four journalists who rejected the idea, only one, a manager at a family-owned newspaper, was unwavering in his opposition. An editor at a corporate-owned newspaper said that although she was opposed, "it would be an experiment that I would watch very closely as somebody from inside the industry. I wouldn't say it would be bad out of hand." A manager at a corporate-owned newspaper who opposed government support recognized its potential to benefit newspapers as long as the government didn't interfere in the journalism. A reporter at a corporate-owned newspaper said she'd re-examine her position if she had more information about what government-subsidized newspapers would look like (See Table 3).

Table 3

*Journalists' Receptiveness to Newspapers' Receiving Government Subsidies*

<u>Role</u>	<u>Career Level*</u>	<u>Newspaper Ownership</u>	<u>Accepting of Newspaper Subsidies?</u>	<u>Level of Receptiveness</u>
Producer	Mid-career	Family	Yes	Amenable
Producer	Entry level	Corporate	Yes	Amenable
Reporter	Entry level	Family	Yes	Amenable
Editor	Late career	Family	Yes	Amenable
Producer	Mid-career	Family	Yes	Wary
Producer	Late career	Corporate	Yes	Wary
Reporter	Mid-career	Corporate	Yes	Very wary
Reporter	Mid-career	Family	Yes	Wary; initially opposed, but opinion shifts
Manager	Late career	Corporate	No	Opposed, but sees potential value
Editor	Late career	Corporate	No	Very wary
Reporter	Entry level	Corporate	No	Opposed, but open to learning more
Manager	Late career	Family	No	Firmly opposed

\*Entry level = Less than 10 years working in news organizations; mid-career = 10-20 years; late career = more than 20 years

Journalists at family-owned newspapers appeared more likely than those at corporate-owned newspapers to embrace the idea of government subsidies. Acceptance by journalists at the corporate newspapers was split: Three were agreeable to subsidies; three were not. However, only one was highly receptive; most were wary. Of the six journalists at family-owned papers, however, all but one were accepting of government support, and three were highly receptive.



Mid-career journalists appeared most likely to support government subsidies for newspapers. All of the four mid-career journalists were accepting; late-career journalists were split — two in favor, three opposed; and two entry-level journalists were in favor, compared to one opposed. All three producers interviewed were accepting of government support, and both managers were opposed; results were mixed among the four reporters and two editors.

Results were also mixed when broken down by newspaper. All three journalists at *The Bulletin* welcomed newspaper subsidies; two at *The Register-Guard* were in favor, one opposed; two at *The Oregonian* were in favor, two opposed; and one at the *Statesman Journal* welcomed subsidies and one did not.

Even though most of the journalists interviewed were accepting of a government-subsidy model for newspapers, none was enthusiastic about it. Two journalists who were wary of government support appeared to be open to it only because, with the newspaper industry in a precarious financial position, they felt any source of revenue could only benefit public-interest journalism. Levels of acceptance varied, however, and even the journalists who were most amenable to newspaper subsidies would accept them only under certain conditions. A reporter at corporate-owned newspaper who was very leery of government subsidies for newspapers said his support was contingent on whether the funding “would result in moving the needle for our readers and listeners or viewers or whatever if it means it’s going to be a growing, thriving enterprise.”

A number of journalists said the funding must come with promises that the government will not intervene in editorial decisions, and some said their acceptance of government support depended on the type of subsidy offered.

*No strings attached.* Six of the eight journalists who supported government subsidies for newspapers stipulated that the funding must come with no influence over the journalism produced. The term “no strings attached” or some variant of it was uttered by five of the 12 journalists interviewed.

About half the journalists interviewed emphasized independence as journalistic principle they value — financial independence especially. “It goes against the very fabric of what our job is if we’re accepting money from the groups we’re supposed to be objectively critiquing,” one reporter said. In practice, though, there are challenges to achieving financial independence, she acknowledged:

There’s this kind of head-butting juxtaposition of, like, we have to be able to fund ourselves to be able to continue to do journalism. But then in order for us to have, to produce quality, independent journalism, we also have to remain separate from the agencies that we are covering.

The same journalist, an entry-level reporter at a corporate-owned newspaper, characterized independence as more than financial, however. She said that in her newsroom, conversations revolve around her newspaper management’s expectations that journalists distance themselves from the interests they cover — for example, what organizations they can donate money to, what they are allowed to share on their personal social media accounts, and prohibition from accepting gifts. A couple of journalists also emphasized the importance of the audience perceiving the newspaper as independent. Accepting money from the government, for example, would make it “difficult to explain or maintain any public perception of independence,” said a manager at a corporate-owned newspaper.

A producer at a family-owned newspaper said government subsidies would be beneficial if “the newspaper was able to function independently and without pressures to write certain stories or write them in a certain way.” An editor at the other family-owned newspaper said she’d need the government to say: “Here’s the money to do what you do well. Do it, and we won’t interfere.” Asked whether additional government support would bolster or threaten the newspaper’s ability to serve the public interest, a reporter at the same paper put it this way:

If it’s just the government deciding that news is a public good and should be supported and just saying here is this amount of money, do with it what you will, make good journalism, that would be positive, and it *would* bolster the newspaper’s mission. But if there were any sort of ties attached to it, it could hurt it. ... I think any idea that ‘We gave you this money, so we want you to report in this way,’ whether it’s spelled out or just implied, would hurt.

***Types of subsidies favored.*** Most of the journalists who were accepting of the idea of government subsidies said they’d be open to either tax breaks or grants. Told during the interviews that newspapers already receive tax breaks designed for publishers, several journalists suggested they were comfortable with that benefit. A reporter and producer at a corporate-owned newspaper, both wary of accepting government subsidies, said a tax incentive shouldn’t necessarily depend on a newspaper’s status as a publisher. The producer said he thought newspapers should receive the same tax incentives that any other company would be entitled to. A reporter at a family-owned newspaper said he was more comfortable with indirect subsidies, such as tax breaks, than with direct subsidies;

grants might come with the expectation that the newspaper do something for the government in return, he said.

A grant that allowed a newsroom to take control of how the money was used, however, might be useful, said a reporter at the other family-owned newspaper. An editor at that paper said she could envision grants such as the support provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, which awards funding for specific community projects, working for newspapers. A producer at a family-owned paper said she'd like to see a model such as community block grants to support newspapers. The producer at a corporate-owned newspaper who had reservations about government subsidies said that if a grant were sustainable and allowed a newsroom to add positions, then he'd expect his newspaper to accept it. He also proposed a different approach to direct subsidies: He said he'd be OK with a tax that would support journalism as long as it was something voters approved.

### **Pressure to Appease Stakeholders**

Despite indications that financial constraints have had an impact on their ability to serve the public interest, most journalists said they have felt no pressure to bow to corporate or government interests, but some expressed concerns that they could experience pressure if circumstances were to change.

**Little existing pressure.** Most journalists were adamant that business interests do not influence their ability to produce public-interest journalism. Seven of the 12 journalists interviewed explicitly stated that no financial stakeholder has tried to control the news they produce. A reporter — the one who was especially critical of his corporate-owned newspaper's management decisions — said that type of influence was a myth:

People talk about the corporate media, or blah-blah-blah, like we're beholden to them. When in reality we have a bunch of people who are making ... [not more than] middle-income salaries and are never once told not to do a story.

He said a situation where journalists were pressured by owners would be an anomaly, but he cited Sheldon Adelson as a rare example. Adelson is the business magnate who secretly purchased the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* in 2015 and subsequently exerted control over editorial content, ordering that some articles be changed or omitted from the paper (Doctor, 2016). Defying orders by the previous owner, GateHouse, journalists at the newspaper investigated the acquisition and exposed Adelson as the new owner (Bustillos, 2016), a sign that even under extraordinary pressure from business interests, journalists may still be capable of producing public-interest journalism.

An editor at a corporate-owned newspaper said reporters and editors are also sometimes accused of a conspiracy to control the news to conform to a bias. But it's not true, she said:

We're just trying to get our arms around all the incoming stories — the news releases, the tips, the emails, the tweets, and the texts that we get every day. So trying to diabolically plan to sway the newsroom one way or the other wouldn't happen.

On the other hand, she said expectations by corporate management, headquartered across the country from her Oregon paper, do influence how she does her job:

They, the corporate parent, sets audience growth goals, they set video viewing goals, they buy new products like polling and video production tools and photography tools that they want us to use, and we are rated on that, and so yes,

I've been asked to do a poll once a week on a story on my team. ... My strings get pulled plenty by my bosses, and I would think that no matter who my boss would be, that would be the case.

A producer at a family-owned paper said corporate owners “dictate how things are covered,” but she didn't offer an example.

Four of the 12 journalists spoke of a figurative divide between the newsroom and the rest of the newspaper. The editor who said her “strings get pulled” by corporate managers explained that in her experience at both corporate-owned and family-owned newspapers, there's been a “bright line” between the newspaper's business operations and the content production, such as newsgathering and editing. However, a producer at a family-owned paper said the line at her paper isn't as bright as it was when she began working there:

Fifteen years ago ... there were very, very clear lines between advertising and news departments, and it was very easy for the news department to say no to the advertising department. In terms of separation of where ads were in the paper or online — in terms of information that ... advertisers might want to get, in terms of how we package things. And what I've seen is this steady regression of power in the newsroom to be able to fend off advertising as it becomes more and more vital for us to receive funding from whatever means we can simply to stay afloat.

For the most part, though, the journalists insisted that overreach by financial stakeholders was rare. A reporter at a family-owned newspaper said that all four for-profit newspapers he's worked for have “just basically asked me to go be a journalist and didn't ask me to try to tell news from one perspective or another.” A producer at a

corporate-owned newspaper said corporate governance, regardless of the business model, doesn't appear to have an impact on public-interest journalism. He said he sees great public-interest journalism from ProPublica, a nonprofit, as well as from for-profit newspapers such as *The New York Times*:

And I don't think that changes the way they approach their work. And I can say the same about where I work. I don't think our business model changes our approach or attitude toward newsgathering. It doesn't affect us in any way, shape or form.

Likewise, the journalists overwhelmingly concurred that the government does not appear to be applying pressure to newspapers. When asked whether existing government subsidies affect their newspaper's press freedom or ability to produce public-interest journalism, all 12 said no. Some journalists said that their lack of awareness of these subsidies was a sign that the funding does not influence their work. Some said that even if the subsidies do have an impact, the journalists have not seen it. "We just don't take that into account when report or when we build stories," said the producer at a corporate-owned newspaper. "It wouldn't change anything about how we cover the Postal Service or the government that is taking out a legal notice in the newspaper. It would make no difference in how or why we would cover a story," said an editor at the other corporate-owned paper. A reporter who was receptive to newspaper subsidies but very leery said he didn't think any organization was completely immune from government influence:

Like if you're a nonprofit, you're not paying property taxes on your building.

[Does that mean you're getting a] sweetheart deal from the government? I don't

know. ... But I don't know that that has any bearing on our mission or our ability to serve the public.

**Potential pressure.** Despite the widespread perception that neither corporate governance nor the government has much influence over their newsgathering and reporting, nearly all of the journalists, when asked to think about new sources of funding, expressed fears of potential pressure. Their concerns were greatest when they talked about accepting money from the government, but some journalists also worried about influence from foundations or corporations. Of the 12 journalists interviewed, only one — a producer at a family-owned newspaper who was amenable to government subsidies — did not express any worries about potential stakeholder pressure. She did, however, say that government money should be accepted only if it came with promises of editorial independence.

One journalist, an editor at a family-owned newspaper, appeared more concerned about stakeholder pressure if corporations were to tighten their grip on newspapers than if publications were to accept government funding: “If we were owned by, say, GE? ... If we did anything wrong, I think we'd hesitate for fear of losing our revenue. You can't do that.” She said the audience's perception of pressure would be a problem, too: If a corporation gave the newspaper money to hire more reporters, then the public would assume “we were in their pocket, that we would do whatever they say. ... That would influence our journalism, if not directly, then indirectly.”

Two journalists said that regardless of the business model, there's potential for stakeholders to apply pressure to journalists. A reporter at a family-owned paper said alternative models such as nonprofits or government subsidies all come with potential



pressures, “and pressures may be amplified to try to spin news one way or another.”

Later, he said he had never felt pressured by any of his employers to slant the news.

Another journalist, a veteran producer who said he’s seen various levels of involvement in news production by his numerous employers, said the potential for stakeholder influence is always present: “However you fund your journalism, whether it’s private or public or a mix of the two or foundations or tech billionaires throwing their money out there at you, there are slippery slopes. And there are dangers.”

Earlier in the interview, the same producer said that “given the current market structure,” he wouldn’t expect subsidies to have a substantial effect on how journalists did their jobs. Later, he said he worried that if the government were to accept direct subsidies like grants, eventually “somebody would step in and say, ‘Hey, you can’t report this because we’re giving you money.’” This was a concern for many of the journalists in this study. A producer at a family-owned newspaper said accepting government funding could open a “can of worms”: “It might have a bit of a chilling effect on the investigative reporting that you have to do into the government agencies that are funding you.”

Subsidies’ impact on journalists’ ability to hold government accountable was a prevailing concern. “It’s really hard to be a watchdog if the one financing you can also then be one of those agencies or things that need to be watched,” said the reporter who discussed potential pressure to spin the news. A reporter at a corporate-owned paper said he worried subsidies might make the newspaper “more of a mouthpiece than a watchdog.”

He questioned whether the newspaper would become less critical of Oregon’s governor “because she’s paying the bills.”

## **Journalism as a Public Good**

Clarke (2009), Pickard et al. (2009), and McChesney (2012) argue that journalism is a public good deserving of an investment by the government. Journalists interviewed for this study were asked whether they considered journalism to be a public good. The definition of “public good” that they were given was “something society needs but that the private sector cannot provide on its own.” This definition is in line with McChesney’s (2012) definition of public good: “something society requires but that the market cannot produce in sufficient quality or quantity” (p. 687). Examples of public goods are education, medical research, and infrastructure, they were told. The question was designed to assess journalists’ perceptions of whether journalism was a worthy government investment. However, the journalists tended to latch onto different components of the question. Some conflated public good with public service, and some inferred that treating journalism as a public good would amount to government control of the newspaper industry. Opinions about whether the private sector was capable of providing journalism on its own were mixed.

**Public service vs. public good.** Many journalists who said they considered journalism a public good provided explanations that were more representative of public service than of the principle that government has a responsibility to sustain journalism. For many of the journalists interviewed, public service was clearly a key principle of public-interest journalism. About half at some point in their interviews characterized their roles or their newspapers’ role as essential to the community or to democracy itself. “Journalism is important to society, to who we are, to people, to individuals,” a producer said. “I think it’s absolutely essential to our democracy and to an informed citizenry,” a

reporter said. One longtime journalist, an editor at a corporate-owned newspaper, even described public service as her motivation for entering the field:

I got into this business because I thought journalism was a way to provide a public good, to protect our Constitution and the First Amendment. ... I read the paper every day [during childhood]. We discussed it every day. It was a place where we found out about our neighborhood, our city, our state, the world around us. ... We are the stand-in for the people who can't advocate or fight government on their own.

A reporter at a corporate-owned newspaper said equipping people with information they need is what journalism “is intended to be” and that journalism can empower them to become engaged in their communities:

It's not my role to advocate for any one solution over the other, but I do think presenting that conversation to the public can be used as a tool for them to take action in it the way that they see fit.

When asked whether she considered journalism to be a public good, that reporter struggled to provide an answer. She said journalism was “a public service” but repeatedly interrupted herself as she sorted through her thoughts about whether it could be provided consistently by the private sector. Without drawing a conclusion, she proceeded to describe public-service qualities of journalism.

A producer at a corporate-owned newspaper took issue with the public-good question, saying he disagreed that the examples of public goods he was given fit the definition. He said medical research is typically privately funded and colleges are largely supported by private companies and benefactors. What he overlooked was that neither

relies entirely on the private sector; the government recognizes the societal value of medicine and schools — higher education, as well as primary and secondary education — and ensures they are supported to some degree. Whether the government should place a societal value on journalism and invest in it, regardless of whether newspapers are supported by the private sector, was at the root of the question. Yet the producer was not the only journalist who did not grasp that nuance. Some other journalists also appeared to infer that the definition of public good entailed a large or even excessive degree of government involvement. A producer at a family-owned paper said:

Do I consider it a public good in the way that *you* just described? I'm not sure I do. Because I think the private sector *has* been able to supply in the past, and because I am nervous about the notion that the press would be a piece of the government. That seems very, very scary to me. I would rather that it remained its own pillar.

The producer was asked if she'd feel differently about journalism as a public good if she thought of government support in terms of grants for newspapers, for example, rather than the operation of newspapers. She said that “makes it less onerous,” although she still had reservations about government funding, which in her view would be unstable because of the volatile nature of political leadership.

After most of the interviews were conducted, it became apparent that the public-good question was not eliciting deliberation about whether the government should be responsible for ensuring the survival of public-interest journalism. So a follow-up question was posed to the remaining four journalists: “If the private sector were unable to sustain journalism, would the government have an obligation to provide funding to

ensure that it persists?” This question gets to the heart of social responsibility theory, which suggests that if the press can’t fulfill its obligation to society, the government could intervene to ensure that it does (Siebert et al., 1956). The producer who had taken issue with the public-good examples said he hoped the government would have such an obligation — he’d prefer that the government fund newspapers rather than more aircraft carriers, he said — but he wasn’t sure it was a necessity. A producer at a corporate-owned paper said yes, the government would be obligated to intervene, but he was concerned that intervention might pose conflicts of interest. The other two journalists who received this question, a reporter and a manager at a family-owned newspaper, said they didn’t think the government had an obligation to ensure that journalism remained funded. Both said they thought it would result in the government’s effort to create its own news. The manager then asked if the question was instead referring to subsidies for privately owned companies but said that even that was too much government interference.

**Private sector’s efficacy.** When asked whether they considered journalism to be a public good, six of the 12 journalists discussed whether they believed the private sector was capable of providing journalism on its own. Four said the private sector was capable; two said it was not.

The manager at a family-owned newspaper who was staunchly opposed to government subsidies for newspapers simply noted that private enterprise creates and provides journalism; he appeared unwilling to entertain the idea that the model could be disrupted. The manager at a corporate-owned newspaper was also resolute: Journalism always has been done with private funding, it can be done with private funding, and it

should be done with private funding. The producer who pointed out that the private sector is involved some public-good institutions — and who later expressed hope that the government would feel obligated to help sustain journalism if necessary — said the private sector could independently sustain journalism “if it could find an economic model like we once had.”

A producer at a family-owned newspaper who was amenable to government subsidies for newspapers said the private sector, incapable on its own of supporting journalism, could work in partnership with the public sector. A producer at a corporate-owned newspaper said that theoretically, the private sector is capable of providing public-interest journalism but that it appears uninterested in fulfilling its obligation.

### **Government vs. Corporate**

Journalists were asked which posed a greater threat to public-interest journalism: corporate ownership of newspapers or government support. Half said government posed a bigger threat, two said it was corporate ownership, and four said neither was worse than the other (See Table 4).

Table 4

*Corporate vs. Government: What Poses a Bigger Threat to Public-Interest Journalism?*

Which financial model poses a bigger threat to public-interest journalism: corporate ownership of newspapers or government support for newspapers?

<u>Role</u>	<u>Career Level*</u>	<u>Newspaper Ownership</u>	<u>Greater Perceived Threat</u>
Reporter	Entry-Level	Family	Corporate
Producer	Mid-Career	Family	Corporate
Manager	Late career	Corporate	Government
Manager	Late career	Family	Government
Editor	Late career	Corporate	Government
Reporter	Mid-career	Corporate	Government
Reporter	Mid-career	Family	Government
Reporter	Entry level	Corporate	Government
Editor	Late career	Family	Neither
Producer	Late career	Corporate	Neither
Producer	Mid-career	Family	Neither
Producer	Entry level	Corporate	Neither

\*Entry level = Less than 10 years working in news organizations; mid-career = 10-20 years; late career = more than 20 years

A reporter at a family-owned paper said the bigger threat is “definitely corporate ownership.” Her experience watching the fallout of her previous newspaper’s acquisition by GateHouse seemed to inform her response. Of particular concern were hedge funds that “specifically are designed to bring profit for their shareholders. ... They have no interest in furthering the actual interest, business of journalism,” she said; they “will buy a paper and bleed them dry,” leaving communities with a diluted local news source. A producer at a family-owned newspaper said that compared to government, corporations “can have a heavier hand in how things are done.” The producer, who never worked for a

corporate-owned news organization, said she'd welcome government funding as long as the government kept ample distance from the news decisions.

The perceived threat of government interference looms larger than that of corporate ownership, though, for half of the journalists. A reporter said the potential for government to undermine newspapers' watchdog role was an important factor, whereas she believed she had opportunities at her corporate-owned newspaper to develop skills and produce some good work—in spite of economic pressures she acknowledged earlier. For a manager at a corporate-owned newspaper, a major concern was not knowing how subsidies would play out. “The potential pitfalls of corporate ownership are known,” she said, and they are “addressed as best they can be.” But “increasing government support of *American* newspapers, anyway, is new territory” and would be difficult to explain to an audience that demands editorial independence, she said. An editor at a corporate-owned newspaper said her principal concern was abuse of government power: “I just know that in my experience, having been on the other side and covering government, that it's much bigger, it's more Byzantine, and the abuses in government far outweigh the abuses that newspapers have been guilty of.”

Several journalists who acknowledged drawbacks to both corporate ownership and government support didn't feel comfortable singling out either one. “I don't think this is an either/or question. I think there are gray areas in both of these,” said a producer at a corporate-owned newspaper. Indeed, there is a large area where corporate ownership and government support overlap; corporate ownership and government subsidies are not mutually exclusive. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5, *Discussion*.



An editor at another paper said dissatisfaction with corporate management was a factor that drew her to a family-owned newspaper: “We’ve seen what corporate ownership does, you know. Gannett. GateHouse. And so on.” As noted earlier, she also she said she thinks for-profit newspapers tend to make greedy decisions that serve their own business interests more than the public interest. But either way — corporate ownership or government subsidies — there’s potential for stakeholder influence, she said. A producer at the same family-owned newspaper struggled for a response. “They’re both bad,” she said after hesitating; “I think to say the government would be a better choice is just to be a Pollyanna.”

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The First Amendment protects the free press from government intrusion, but it does not preclude government efforts to *support* press freedom. Ironically, free-press advocates, specifically journalists, hesitate to discuss how the government could expand its role in protecting a free press.

In this study, journalists exhibited journalistic principles rooted in press freedom and social responsibility. They acknowledged the newspaper industry is in the midst of a crisis — fueled in part by financial decisions by for-profit publishers — that to a large extent is weakening their ability to meet what they view as their journalistic responsibilities. It's only reasonable that journalists would embrace potential solutions for reversing this deterioration, yet when asked to think about new possibilities for supporting public-interest journalism, they tended to emphasize the potential shortcomings of such models more than their potential benefits. Journalists offered strong justification for being suspicious of government intervention. Some of their fears of heavy-handedness might be unfounded, though, since they tended to downplay pressure from existing financial interests. While they acknowledged indirect pressures, most notably a strain on resources, they insisted that financial stakeholders rarely apply direct pressure on news construction. That raises the question of why journalists fear such pressure would exist if new financial stakeholders were introduced. One possible answer is that they are more comfortable with what's familiar — even if what's familiar is less than ideal — than what remains unknown.

**RQ1: How have changes in the newspaper industry affected journalists' ability to serve the public interest?**

This study used Siegelbaum and Thomas' (2016) research as a launching point for exploring journalists' perceptions about changes to their news work. The researchers' study examined how journalists thought industry changes affected their ability to execute their normative functions through their work. This social-responsibility study posed a similar question: How have changes in the newspaper industry affected journalists' ability to serve the public interest? And the findings of this study are in line with theirs. Siegelbaum and Thomas (2016) found that Midwest news workers valued journalism as a public service and a pillar of democracy but felt that industry pressures such as layoffs and convergence of duties threatened their ability to execute that responsibility. Similarly, Oregon newspaper journalists interviewed for this study exhibited strong normative values, but, with a few exceptions, acknowledged that changes to their news work threatened their ability to serve the public interest.

Journalists in this study were not specifically asked to identify principles of public-interest journalism, but they offered clues about the values they assign to newspapers and to their roles as journalists. Of normative significance to journalists were their watchdog role of holding powerful institutions accountable, independence to construct news without pressure from special interests, public service in the interest of supporting a democratic society, journalistic quality, and credibility. Most of these values align with the ideals of public-interest journalism as outlined by the Hutchins Commission (Hutchins, 1947) and social responsibility theory (Siebert et al., 1956).

Journalists in this study attributed the newspaper industry's financial crisis to

publishers' struggle to adapt to the demands of the digital age, poor strategic decisions by newspaper management, and audiences' waning trust of newspapers and professional journalism. As a result of the crisis, journalists have experienced a wealth of changes to their work, many of which have had a negative impact on their ability to serve the public interest. Journalists felt restricted by a shrinking workforce as a result of layoffs and staff turnover, an expanding workload that often means doing more than one job at a time or having less time to complete their work, reduced news coverage that has resulted in local communities' being underserved, demands from audiences and management to prioritize immediacy, workplace goals that emphasize online traffic and engagement, and a weakened financial position to mount legal challenges. In the wake of all of these changes, weak morale has also plagued journalists. Several were interviewed for this study just days after learning about another round of layoffs in their newsroom or their newspaper's acquisition by a corporate powerhouse notorious for slashing newsroom staffs. Among the journalist who referenced these developments, one expressed substantial negativity; the layoffs' impact on morale was evident in his responses. In some cases, a reference to the layoffs or the acquisition was an acknowledgment that additional changes to journalists' news work was imminent. And a couple of journalists who were not directly affected by these developments characterized *The Register-Guard's* sale to GateHouse as a further indication of the perilous state of Oregon's newspaper industry.

In some ways, though, journalists said changes to their news work have actually helped them serve the public interest. Journalists touted being able to deliver information to audiences immediately, to develop a closer relationship to their audience through

social media and online metrics, and to take advantage of opportunities to learn new skills and deliver news in new ways.

Most of the changes journalists have experienced, however, have not been so positive. Fewer journalists and narrower coverage areas, for example, weaken newspapers' ability to hold institutions accountable and to provide the public with information they need to participate in a democratic society. Prioritizing immediacy over accuracy — that's one change a producer at a corporate-owned newspaper observed — could threaten a newspaper's reputation as a credible and trustworthy source of news. These conflicts are what Siegelbaum and Thomas (2016) call “normative rupture,” the distance between normative values and the ability to execute those values. Understanding these values and conflicts provides important context for answering the remaining research questions about how financial stakeholders influence journalists' ability to serve the public interest.

**RQ2: How do journalists perceive the influence newspapers' corporate governance has on their ability to serve the public interest?**

Because of media organizations' social and political functions, prudent corporate governance is important, says Picard (2005). Corporate governance, which involves the relationship between owner and manager, can entail owners' influencing managers to make decisions that benefit shareholders (Picard, 2005). The second research question in this study asked how journalists perceive the influence newspapers' corporate governance has on their ability to serve the public interest.

Indirect pressure from financial interests is wholly evident when one looks at how journalists' news work has changed over time. Journalists have been forced to make great

sacrifices in news production because of financial constraints, and as a result, some communities are suffering a dearth of public-interest journalism. But newspaper shareholders are not necessarily hurting. As Gannett celebrated annual revenue growth for 2017 (Business Wire, 2018), a reporter at its Salem newspaper, the *Statesman Journal*, described low wages, a vanishing career development budget, a crackdown on overtime hours, and a long list of public-interest stories that won't all get covered because there aren't enough reporters. How *The Oregonian* is faring amid a recent round of layoffs is not as clear because as a privately owned company, its corporate parent is not required to publicly report earnings. One *Oregonian* reporter said he wished he could see his employer's financial reports.

An editor at a family-owned publication thought that family-owned newspapers were spared some of the pressures journalists face at corporate papers. However, journalists at the family-owned *Bulletin* and *The Register-Guard* described the same types of constraints — staff reductions, reduced coverage, heavier workloads — as those at corporate-owned newspapers. The likelihood that these two papers are as profitable as their publicly traded counterpart is slim, though; journalists at one of the papers described the company's fight to survive and its inability to consistently meet payroll deadlines, while the longtime owners of the other paper decided to sell their company. "That will require all kinds of adjustments," acknowledged a newsroom manager at that paper, who is a member of the family that sold it.

Although indirect pressure from newspaper owners, specifically financial limitations that have restricted journalists' ability to serve the public interest, is apparent, direct pressure from financial stakeholders is not as noticeable. Newspapers boast a long-

held tradition of a figurative wall that divides business operations from news construction, affording journalists editorial independence from financial interests. One journalist, a producer at a family-owned newspaper, said she's observed the wall crumble at her news organization, and another, an editor at a corporate-owned paper, said her "strings get pulled plenty by my bosses," referring to pressure to meet growth-oriented content goals created by the newspaper's corporate managers. The same editor, however, touted the divide between business and journalism:

There is a very tall wall between – and always has been in my experience – between the business side and the newsgathering side. And I'm comfortable with that. I know that. I find that it works, and it has worked for centuries.

So it's worth asking whether the wall is a myth journalists perpetuate in the face of increasing pressure from financial stakeholders. Even if it is, journalists don't necessarily perceive such pressure. Most of the journalists interviewed said they see no evidence that financial stakeholders influence how they do their jobs.

**RQ3: How do journalists think government financial support for newspapers might influence their ability to serve the public interest?**

The third research question asked how journalists think government financial support for newspapers might influence their ability to serve the public interest. Even as their ability to produce public-interest news work is threatened by financial constraints, journalists believe financial stakeholders have minimal influence over news workers' social-responsibility role. When they imagine the government as a financial stakeholder, however, their concerns about influence intensify.

For some journalists, this is because the government has demonstrated to them

that it can't effectively or fairly manage public money or because the federal government, in particular, has a history of behavior that is unsupportive of press freedom, such as trying to compel reporters to expose sources. Some also worry that newspaper funding could be used as a political football — as has been the case for the Corporation of Public Broadcasting — which would threaten the stability of newspapers' revenue. Not receiving funding they depend on could have a negative impact on newspapers' ability to serve the public interest. But, some journalists acknowledged, that's not so different from where newspapers are now, relying almost entirely on the free market.

The principal concern for most of the journalists is that the government might expect to have some degree of control over newspapers if it were to provide them with subsidies. Newspapers' watchdog role and editorial independence are key normative values for the journalists, who worry that accepting government money would compromise those values. All the journalists interviewed for this study, however, acknowledged that the indirect subsidies their newspapers already receive, albeit small, don't appear to have any influence over their news work. Granted, some journalists were unaware of these existing subsidies, but perhaps, as the proverb goes, what they don't know can't hurt them: If they aren't aware of these funding sources, they might be unlikely to observe any pressure that stems from them.

For most of the journalists, the idea of government-subsidized newspapers is new territory. Participants — most of whom had not given any prior consideration to government funding newspapers — were presented with a broad concept of government support, which gave them ample room to make assumptions about what a subsidy model might look like. Many of them gravitated toward the worst-case scenario: a government-



controlled press, the antithesis of the First Amendment.

How journalists interpreted the concept of government financial support for newspapers undoubtedly informed their opinions about it, and how the concept was framed in this study inevitably influenced their interpretations. One question the journalists were asked — “Which financial model poses the bigger threat to public-interest journalism: corporate ownership of newspapers or government support for newspapers? — essentially pitted private ownership against government support. The two are not mutually exclusive, however. Government media subsidies can — and usually do — complement a free-market ownership model. This framing of government versus corporate was intended to assess journalists’ ideas about two separate forces of influence, not to suggest that they cannot coexist. But this framing might have made it easy for the journalists to conceive of government control, not merely support, of newspapers. This might have contributed to journalists’ understanding of government support as a polarized concept: On one end of the spectrum is the status quo, where the U.S. government provides little support for newspapers, and on the other is government ownership and control.

Of course, there is a vast middle ground that few of the journalists entertained — probably because they weren’t provided with details about how these subsidy schemes work. They were told only that “most free-press countries offer newspapers benefits such as tax breaks and ad revenue.” Had they been given more context about subsidies in some of the countries that enjoy substantial press freedom, perhaps the concept of government support would have been more palatable to them. For example, the Nordic countries — Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden — all rank among the world’s top 10

for press freedom (Freedom House, 2017), and their governments have traditionally provided considerable financial support to the news media (Ohlsson, 2015).

When asked what type of government support they thought U.S. newspapers should receive, some journalists interviewed for this study favored indirect subsidies, such as tax cuts, over direct subsidies. Schweizer et al. (2014) note that many countries prefer indirect subsidies because they are less controversial. Some journalists in this study shared that sentiment, saying that because they didn't know about existing indirect subsidies, those funding sources must not be influencing their work. The problem with this out-of-sight, out-of-mind philosophy, however, is that indirect subsidies may lack transparency and, thus, provide opportunities for government influence over the press to go undetected. Examples of this exist in the United Kingdom (Baines, 2013), Greece (Papathanassopoulos, 2013), and Bulgaria (Kantchev & Ognyanova, 2013). Direct measures of support, such as helping fund a second newspaper in a specific market, are more suitable to fostering editorial competition and preventing ownership concentration, say Schweizer et al. (2014).

The allocation of government subsidies is delicate because it must honor media freedom, but selective subsidies can keep the government's discretionary power to a minimum by clearly defining eligibility criteria (Schweizer et al., 2014). In the United States, a country where journalism and propaganda have equal free-speech protection, selective subsidies could help ensure that the funding is fostering newspapers' service to democracy. The government could adopt eligibility requirements similar to those adopted in other free-press countries, such as diversity of topics covered, a minimum share of content created independently, minimum journalist staffing levels, and ownership

restrictions (Murschetz & Karmasin, 2013; Schweizer et al., 2014). It could also reward fairness, accuracy, transparency, and other normative principles of journalism (Murschetz & Karmasin, 2013). Indeed, assessing the democratic value of media would not be unprecedented for the U.S. government; the Federal Communications Commission is already responsible for promoting competition, diversity, and localism in media policymaking.

Although the purpose of this thesis is not to identify a potential subsidy scheme for U.S. newspapers, the researcher believes future discussions about newspaper subsidies should entertain a model that perpetuates, and even augments, existing indirect subsidies such as postal discounts and tax breaks and also introduces direct, selective subsidies that advance news quality, diversity of ownership, and editorial competition by establishing strict eligibility requirements for receiving funding.

Although the journalists interviewed for this study were not informed about specific subsidy schemes and despite their concerns about pressure to appease government, most were receptive to the idea of government-supported newspapers to some degree. A third of the journalists embraced the idea of subsidies for newspapers as a much-needed revenue source with the potential to advance newspapers' public-interest mission. Another third were open to subsidies for newspapers but expressed greater reluctance to expand government's role in the newspaper industry. And another third were not accepting of the idea of increasing government funding for newspapers. Among that group, though, only one was staunchly opposed; others either saw some potential value in government support or were open to learning more.

Journalists who had been working in news organizations for at least 30 years

were more likely to resist the idea of government-subsidized newspapers. This was not a completely unexpected result. Assumptions scholars have made about journalists' resistance to press subsidies are rooted in traditional watchdog values (McChesney, 2012; Pickard, 2013), and perhaps these values are more deeply ingrained in more seasoned journalists. One research participant with almost 40 years of experience in news organizations said that the Watergate era fueled a perception of newspapers' "fighting the good fight and holding government's and politicians' feet to the fire and rooting out corruption" but that today, newspapers suffer credibility issues that minimize their reputation as watchdogs. Meanwhile, journalists with 20 years of experience or less in news organizations tended to be more receptive to the idea of government subsidies for newspapers.

Most of the journalists who were highly amenable to government subsidies for newspapers were from family-owned newspapers, and most of those who were highly opposed to subsidies were from corporate-owned newspapers. However, most of the journalists in this study have experience working in both corporate- and non-corporate-owned news organizations. During their interviews, many of them reflected on their diverse experiences; it was evident that these experiences informed their opinions. Interestingly, though, three of the four most ardent opponents of government-subsidized newspapers had experience working for only one employer, whether a corporation or a family. Perhaps the other journalists' exposure to different newsroom environments fostered more open minds about newspaper reform models.

A general receptiveness to the idea of government support for newspapers suggests there might be room for the subsidies question in broader conversations about

newspaper-industry reform. Educating journalists about what government subsidies might look like for newspapers would be critical, though, as a lack of familiarity with this topic was evident among most journalists in this study. Making journalists aware of existing government subsidies for newspapers and of details about specific subsidy schemes could be an effective way to advance the government-subsidies conversation within the newspaper industry.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

This qualitative study aimed to understand journalists' attitudes about government-subsidized newspapers rather than to accept assumptions that are based not on research but on anecdotal evidence. The presumed worry is that federal funding would force newspapers to succumb to government interests, endangering a free press. Social responsibility theory, however, is more concerned about corporate power than government power, suggesting that the government could advance newspapers' obligation to serve the public interest if their corporate owners failed to do so (Nerone, 1995). Today, there appears to be widespread agreement that many corporate-owned newspapers are falling short of their obligation to society. This study used social responsibility theory to explore how journalists make sense of the power wielded by corporate and government interests. It examined the following research questions: How have changes in the newspaper industry affected journalists' ability to serve the public interest (RQ1), how do journalists perceive the influence newspapers' corporate governance has on their ability to serve the public interest (RQ2), and how do journalists think government financial support for newspapers might influence their ability to serve the public interest (RQ3)?

This study found that journalists have experienced a substantial transformation in their news work in recent years as a result of changes in both technology and allocation of resources. They're doing more work with smaller staffs, their newspapers cover fewer stories and a smaller geographic area, and they are more focused on the demands of their digital audiences. Although some of the journalists said these changes have helped them

serve the public interest, most of the changes are perceived as having a negative impact on journalists' social-responsibility role.

These changes are examples of owners' or managers' indirect influence on journalists' ability to serve the public interest, as they have forced journalists to make sacrifices to their public-interest work. While most of the journalists in this study are aware of these indirect pressures, they insist that they do not experience direct pressure from their newspapers' financial stakeholders. They're not being told what to cover — or what not to cover — by owners or corporate shareholders. They value editorial independence and their role in holding powerful institutions accountable, and for the most part, they believe financial stakeholders don't get in their way of their ability to execute those values. They're not so sure these values would be so well protected, though, if a larger chunk of newspaper revenue came from the government.

Concerns about government overreach, political maneuvering, and fiscal instability make journalists reluctant to embrace the idea of increased government support for newspapers. The most salient fear is that a government that issues subsidies to newspapers might expect to have some control over editorial content. Half of the journalists in this study said government support for newspapers posed a bigger threat to public-interest journalism than corporate ownership of newspapers. While some were highly critical of corporate ownership, most of the remaining journalists said neither scenario was ideal. On the other hand, none of the journalists interviewed believed existing government subsidies for newspapers influenced their ability to serve the public interest. Some journalists weren't even aware that these subsidies existed. Nor had most

of the journalists given much thought to the idea of government support for newspapers prior to participating in this study.

Despite their reservations, most journalists were receptive to the idea of government-supported newspapers. Some acknowledged that they'd need more information about how subsidies would work, as well as assurances that their editorial autonomy would be protected, before they could embrace the concept more fully.

### **Limitations and Further Research**

While this study sought to understand journalists' perceptions about accepting government subsidies, it did not explore what those subsidies would or should look like. The type or types of subsidies that would be issued, how they would be implemented, and what goals they would advance are topics for further research. Picard (2013) says answering the following questions is fundamental:

What arrangement of influence of among the state, the market, and social/cultural institutions will produce the most desirable outcomes, what roles does communication play in creating and maintaining the optimal symmetry of their influences, and where do organized news activities — a particular form of communication — fall into the functioning of those arrangements[?] (p. 50)

The lack of specificity about a subsidy scheme also made it challenging for the journalists in this study to grasp the concept of government-subsidized journalism. Exposure to a broad concept rather than a specific proposal for government funding of newspapers allowed participants to make assumptions about what a subsidy scheme might look like, and not all journalists' assumptions were identical. Some, for example, jumped to the conclusion of government control of the press, whereas others focused



more on tax breaks or grants. Future research could narrow in on several proposals for newspaper subsidies and assess journalists' opinions about those specific models.

Timing is a limitation for this study, as well. Securing public funding for social programs has become more challenging at a time when lawmakers who brand themselves as fiscal conservatives have a grip on Congress. Meanwhile, the news industry's credibility has been waning, and persuading taxpayers and lawmakers to fund journalism could be a tough battle. This study, however, was not intended to assess the political will to subsidize the U.S. press. Politicians' perceptions of federal press subsidies would be a relevant topic for further study. Attitudes about specific types of press-subsidy schemes would also be worthy of research as part of a broader exploration of the viability of press subsidies for U.S. newspapers.

Furthermore, this study, which focused on journalists at for-profit daily newspapers, did not include nondaily publications, nonprofits, or other types of news organizations, such as online publications and broadcast news. And although this research included both privately owned and publicly owned companies, it did not include a cross-case analysis of these newspapers. Because publicly traded companies are accountable to shareholders, their financial records are made public, whereas private companies are not required to disclose earnings. Whether the financial transparency required of publicly held companies has a different impact on journalists' perceptions of influence than the opaqueness of some private news organizations could be examined much more thoroughly than this study allowed. Future research could also explore whether there are differences in journalists' attitudes based on frequency of publication or type of news organization. Because public radio and nonprofits receive more government

subsidies than for-profit newspapers, comparing attitudes of journalists at traditional news organizations to those of journalists at nonprofits would also be a logical approach to advancing this research.

Narrowing the focus on Oregon newspapers was another factor that limited this research, as it's hard to make generalizations based on specific cases. However, Yin (1994) cautions against trying to select representative cases. Instead, he says replication should be the goal in a multi-case study. If similar results are obtained from all the cases, then replication is achieved and the research lends itself to a theoretical framework rather than a generalization (Yin, 1994). Quantitative surveys, as Beam et al. (2009) used in their study of journalists' attitudes about public service in their profession, might be a better approach to this research if the aim is to generalize among a large sample size.

This study also did not examine what characteristics, such as job function or years of experience in news organizations, might make a journalists more or less inclined to be accepting of government subsidies for newspapers. A quantitative survey might also be an appropriate method for this type of research.

While journalists in this study were asked how certain factors would influence how they do their job, this research focused primarily on the for-profit newspaper model and on potential government subsidies. In fact, many other models have been proposed for newspaper reform. This study touched on newspaper journalists' opinions about how to fund public-interest journalism, but further exploration of what they perceive as an ideal business model for the industry would be a welcome addition to the body of literature on newspaper reform.

An interview question that lacked precision also might have limited the results of this study. Journalists were asked whether they considered journalism to be a public good and were given a specific definition of public good. Journalists' interpretations of this question appeared to vary, and few responded in a way that addressed the intended nature of the question, which was whether the government has a responsibility to ensure that public-interest journalism prospers. Future research could explore this question more in-depth.

Furthermore, the researcher's prior experience working at the *Statesman Journal*, while not a limitation in and of itself, resulted in some challenges. Because the researcher excluded journalists she had worked with closely, coupled with the fact that the newsroom staff at the Gannett-owned *Statesman Journal* had become so small, the researcher was left with a narrow pool of potential research candidates from that newspaper and was able to get consent from only two of them. Gaining access to participants was further complicated by the fact that some research candidates were unwilling to participate without seeking permission from a supervisor. It's worth noting that no journalist at any other site expressed a need to obtain permission. A concern on the researcher's part is that notifying a supervisor about participation may jeopardize the participant's confidentiality and discourage him or her from speaking candidly. One journalist from this newspaper used great caution when speaking critically of newspapers not to implicate his own employer. It appeared he was otherwise speaking frankly, so this limitation did not disqualify the data. It did, however, raise questions about Gannett's level of control over its employees' behavior. Both *Statesman Journal* journalists who participated in this study expressed a higher degree of positivity about their jobs than did

participants from other newspapers. This might be because they are entry-level journalists who have not experienced the industry turmoil that more seasoned journalists have. (Attempts to recruit more experienced journalists from this newspaper were unsuccessful.) The researcher is also left to wonder if Gannett has succeeded in selling a positive image of the company to its young staffers. Any interpretations the researcher made about the organizational culture there were excluded from this study's findings because they were informed by her own bias, which stems from her experience working there previously, as well as by rumors she's heard from current and former Gannett employees. But whether Gannett promotes a culture that restricts personal behavior and overstates its commitment to the public interest is worthy of further investigation by a researcher who does not hold the same bias.

Some findings in this study also raised additional questions ripe for future research. For example, a number of journalists at daily newspapers noted a reduction in coverage of local communities. By including other types of news organizations — such as weekly newspapers, broadcast news, or hyperlocal independent websites — in future research about public-interest journalism, researchers could examine whether these sources are filling gaps in daily newspapers' coverage.

One code that emerged in this study was the figurative wall dividing newspapers' business and newsgathering arms. While some journalists insisted on the existence of this wall, one participant observed a breakdown of the wall over the years. Future research could explore how that separation is perceived by newspapers' news workers and non-news workers and whether news workers' autonomy from the newspaper's business operations has faded as concerns about revenue have become more prominent.

A couple of journalists in this study mentioned Voice of America, which would be an appropriate subject for future research on how government funding influences news construction. VOA is a government news organization funded by Congress. Whether VOA news workers are able to embrace the news organization's code of ethics in spite of government control could offer clues about whether government funding for traditional news organizations might result in pressure on journalists to satisfy a government agenda. Purchasing legal notices is another way government is involved in the press, and further research could explore whether these notices hurt or help newspapers' independence.

Some journalists also noted that despite public-records laws, budget restraints might have an impact on their ability to access records. One journalist said she thought government agencies had become more guarded of their information, as well. Further research on the viability of press subsidies might include questions about whether government money would be used to pay government agencies for records requests. Also worthy of research is whether journalists need more training on how to obtain information from public agencies at no cost.

Despite its limitations, this study provided a rare exploration of what journalists think about government subsidies for newspapers. It did so by looking at how journalists at four Oregon newspapers perceived financial stakeholders' and government's influence over the ability of news workers to serve the public interest. Some scholars who have advocated for the government to provide greater support to the U.S. free press, an essential component of a democratic society, have suggested that government subsidies are a taboo topic among journalists who value their watchdog role (McChesney, 2012; Pickard, 2013). This study aimed to explore the validity of such an assumption at a time

when corporations wield substantial power in the newspaper industry. Do journalists think corporate governance threatens their public-interest role, and if so, would they welcome government subsidies as a potential remedy?

This study supported assumptions that journalists were leery of government subsidies, but it also showed that they were not opposed to considering government support as an option for newspaper reform. After all, journalists were all too familiar with the pitfalls of the status quo, a corporate-dominated newspaper industry that is hemorrhaging newsroom resources crucial to the public interest. Historically, the government has shown a willingness to invest in the Fourth Estate, and now, such an investment might be needed more than ever. This research was a first step in assessing attitudes about such intervention.

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## Appendix A

### RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear [name],

My name is Monica Kwasnik, and I'm a graduate student at the Missouri School of Journalism. [Mutual acquaintance/colleague] might have told you I'd be contacting you. I'd like to invite you to participate in a research study I'm conducting for my master's thesis. It's about public-interest journalism and forms of newspaper funding.

I've worked as a journalist — mostly on copy desks — at daily and weekly newspapers in Salem and Portland, as well as in other states. Today, I live in Salem and do my schooling through Missouri's online program. I'm studying media management with an emphasis on newspapers and social responsibility.

My research focuses on daily newspapers in the Pacific Northwest, so your perspective as [job title/role] at [newspaper/employer] will be of great value to my study, which will contribute to a growing body of research on newspaper reform.

May I interview you for this study? Participation is voluntary, and your identity will remain confidential.

Our interview will take about 20 to 30 minutes. If we can't meet in person, we can talk via Skype or phone.

If you'd like to participate or if you have questions, please contact me at 503-881-9664 or [mkbn4@mail.missouri.edu](mailto:mkbn4@mail.missouri.edu).

Thank you for considering this opportunity.

Sincerely,  
Monica Kwasnik

*(The underlined sentence will be used only in cases where I gain access to the prospective participant through a mutual acquaintance or colleague.)*



## Appendix B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1: As newspapers struggle to remain profitable, various proposals have been considered to financially sustain public-interest journalism. Among these are to create new revenue opportunities within the existing for-profit ownership model, to operate newspapers as nonprofit or low-profit organizations with support from foundations and other donors, and to accept greater financial support from government agencies. How do you think public-interest journalism should be funded today? Please explain.
- 2: How has your news work changed since you assumed your current job, as well as over the course of your journalism career?
- 3: How have economic factors (for example: staffing levels, mergers, revenue sources) influenced the ways your work has changed?
- 4: How have these changes to your work helped or hindered your ability as a journalist to serve the public interest?
- 5: Do economic constraints in the newspaper industry have a bearing on freedom of the press? Please explain.
- 6: Your newspaper receives some government support: federal postal discounts, revenue from legal notices, and various tax breaks designed for publishers, for example. Does this government support have a bearing on your newspaper's press freedom or on its ability to produce public-interest journalism? Please explain.
- 7: Do you consider journalism to be a public good, meaning something society needs but that the private sector cannot provide on its own? Per this definition, examples of public goods include education, medical research, and infrastructure.
- 8: It's typical for newspapers worldwide to receive some form of government support. Most free-press countries offer newspapers benefits such as tax breaks and ad revenue, although these incentives are lowest in the United States. Many governments also offer newspapers grants to expand circulation or to support journalism quality. What kind of government financial support, if any, do you think your newspaper should receive?
- 9: Would additional government financial support bolster or threaten your newspaper's ability to produce journalism that serves the public interest? Please explain.
- 10: Which financial model poses a bigger threat to public-interest journalism: corporate ownership of newspapers or government support for newspapers? Why?

11: Prior to this interview, how much consideration had you given to government-supported journalism? And has your opinion ever shifted? Please explain.

At the end of the interview, respondents will also be asked demographic questions regarding their educational background, years they've worked at their current newspaper, years they've worked in news organizations, what news organizations they worked at previously, and what roles they've had in news organizations.

## Appendix C

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

#### Appendix C.1: Interview 1, manager, corporate-owned newspaper

Phone interview; January 26, 2018

**As newspapers struggle to remain profitable, various proposals have been considered to financially sustain public-interest journalism. Among these are to create new revenue opportunities within the existing for-profit ownership model, to operate newspapers as nonprofit or low-profit organizations with support from foundations and other donors, and to accept greater financial support from government agencies. How do you think public-interest journalism should be funded today?**

I think it should be funded by the people who benefit from it, the public. And I'm open to grant-based independent journalism.

**How has your news work changed since you assumed your current job, as well as over the course of your journalism career?**

How has the work changed?

Yes.

[Pause.] Oh, boy. I started in 1983, so [laughs] it's pretty much [inaudible]. The fundamentals have not changed, which is the truth-telling aspect. But the delivery, the speed and the audience focus, in the sense of the audience, I think we're closer to the interests of our audience today than we ever have been.

**How have economic factors – for example, staffing levels, mergers, revenue sources – influenced the ways your work has changed?**

It has reduced our ability to cover as many subjects as in-depth. We've had to focus our efforts geographically on our core audience. And also even though our readership obviously is larger than it's ever been because the website, but our ability to cover even the suburbs and the state has been diminished. And the number of journalists we have working has been reduced dramatically. So that forces us to choose what subjects will and will not be covered, as well.

**OK. And then, how have these changes to your work helped or hindered your ability as a journalist to serve the public interest?**

[Pause.] Well, it's just made us have to choose, and obviously that means some potentially worthy subjects don't get covered.

**So this next question also has a little bit of background. Your newspaper receives some government support: federal postal discounts, revenue from legal notices, and various tax breaks designed for publishers, for example. Does this government support have a bearing on your newspaper's press freedom or on its ability to produce public-interest journalism?**

No.

**OK. Is this anything more you can elaborate on that?**

I mean, all of that is separate from the newsroom. So, you know, at my level as a journalist, it doesn't affect us one way or another.

**OK. Do economic constraints in the newspaper industry have a bearing on freedom of the press?**

I would say, in particular, the ability to mount costly legal challenges to public records' being withheld or courts' rulings' being sealed, you know that's something that definitely has an effect. But if you take somebody to court over hidden records, you may or may not get your fees back. So, it does [inaudible] I think the calculus in terms of our First Amendment right to information when it comes down to suing over things.

**OK. Do you consider journalism to be a public good? And what I mean by that is something society needs but that the private sector cannot provide on its own? According to this definition, examples of public goods include education, medical research and infrastructure.**

I think it *can* be provided with private funding. So I think it's a think a public good, but by your definition that it's a public good that *cannot* be, I'd say no it's not under that definition. Because I think it should be privately, and can be, in terms of most of its existence *has* been privately [inaudible].

**OK. A little bit of background on this next one, too. It's typical for newspapers worldwide to receive some form of government support. Most free-press countries offer newspapers benefits such as tax breaks and ad revenue, although these incentives are lowest in the United States. Many governments also offer newspapers grants to expand circulation or to support quality journalism – or, rather, journalism quality. What kind of government financial support, if any, do you think your newspaper should receive?**

I think only what you mentioned, which is traditional, traditional postal concessions in the interest of an informed democracy, and public notice revenue in the interest of, again, informing the public.

**OK. Would additional government financial support bolster or threaten your newspaper's ability to produce journalism that serves the public interest?**

[Pause.] Assuming it was in the form I mentioned, it would bolster it. In other words, no strings attached. But a straight transaction for services.

**OK. So, are you saying if there's any give and take as a result of that, if there are any expectations of demands for receiving that support, then you think it could *threaten* the – ?**

Yeah. I think if it's any crossing of that line in terms of what – strings attached, as opposed to straight-up transaction, we are buying an ad from you, here's our money.

**Which financial model poses a bigger threat to public-interest journalism: corporate ownership of newspapers or government support for newspapers?**

Government.

**OK. And I know you've already explained that a little bit. Is there anything you want to say about why that is a bigger threat than corporate?**

Well, I just think that corporate, the potential pitfalls of corporate ownership are known, and you know, addressed as best they can be, and that the, increasing government support of *American* newspapers, anyway, is new territory that, you know, would be fraught, I think, and difficult to explain or maintain any public perception of independence if we went down that road.

**Sure. OK. And then, prior to this interview, how much consideration had you given to government-supported journalism? And has your opinion ever shifted?**

No, I hadn't given a lot of thought to it in the sense of government-supported newspaper journalism through an independent newspaper. There's certainly, I've thought a *lot* about government creating its own news channels and bypassing the traditional independent media. Our local regional government, [agency name], hired reporters years ago and puts out – they cover their own meetings and put out their own news product and claim it's independent, and our local public medical school did the same thing last year. So that's more of a model here than anything direct to newspapers.

I also was very active in the press association fight to keep public notices in newspapers during the foreclosure crisis. There was a court in Oregon law that meant suddenly many, many, many foreclosure notices were not going into local newspapers. My particular paper had never relied on foreclosure notices to the degree as other smaller papers around the state did. Because we were a statewide organization and I was on the board, I had to do a lot of talking and thinking and researching about the public notice question.

**Is there anything else along these lines of what we've been talking about that, did you have any thoughts about anything that you would like to add, or any questions?**

Nope.

## **Appendix C.2: Interview 2, manager, family-owned newspaper**

Phone interview; February 7, 2018

**So the first question I have for you, I have a little bit of background. So as newspapers struggle to remain profitable, various proposals have been considered to financially sustain public-interest journalism. Among these are to create new revenue opportunities within the existing for-profit ownership model, to operate newspapers as nonprofit or low-profit organizations with support from foundations and other donors, and to accept greater financial support from government agencies. How do you think public-interest journalism should be funded today?**

Well, I'd love to think that we could get more government funding or something like that. The problem, of course, is that we cover government. And so we can't accept money from government and still be independent journalists. And so that's kind of off the table in my mind. Getting foundational support, there – obviously that's already happening in some areas – and that can work. It's an unstable source, though, and it's something that's, you can't necessarily rely on it, so that's problematic. But I'm seeing a lot of that where you can get grants for extra reporters for projects. We'll probably be seeing a lot more of that in the future.

**OK. Is there anything that you would consider an ideal model at this point?**

I wish there was one. If there were, the industry wouldn't be in so much trouble. And so, I don't think anyone has solved the riddle of the Sphinx there for that particular problem [chuckle]. But, you know, the best model is still one based on advertising and circulation. Circulation is becoming more of a driver of revenue for our newspaper, as well as many, many newspaper companies. And then there is lots of experimentation going on with digital services. Our newspaper company has delved into that significantly. It's – there's a question about how profitable that can be, but – And then there's all kinds of other funding sources that you see throughout the country and the world, including events, which is becoming a huge piece of at least financial hopes, I don't know. Some companies claim that they've been very successful sponsoring events and charging for them and getting revenue that way. So there's, you know, there's lots of experimentation. I don't think anyone has found a pot of gold there. So.

**OK. And how has your news work changed since you assumed your current job, as well as over the course of your journalism career?**

Wow. Well. It's changed immensely. Certainly over the last 10 years or so, for a couple of reasons. One being the need to continually adjust because the resources have shrunk, and so the staff has shrunk. So we've had to reorganize many, many times. And like most newspaper companies, we've lost more than half of our staff. Certainly in the newsroom, it's well over half. And so that's been just a *huge* adjustment, and it's required a change in just the structure of the newsroom but also in my job and what I have to concentrate on.

So that's one reason. The other factor is just the technological shift that's taken place. It's required all of us to be multitaskers and to incorporate digital into our workload. And so, that's been a huge adjustment.

**OK. So you've already mentioned a little bit of this, but I'm going to ask. How do economic factors – such as staffing levels, mergers, revenue sources – influence the ways your work has changed?**

Well, again staffing has changed everything. If you lose more than half your staff, you've got to do things differently. People have to combine duties, and in some respects completely change the jobs they originally took on. So there are multiple examples of that throughout the newsroom and throughout the company. As far as mergers and things like that, we haven't – we're an independently, family-owned newspaper, and so we haven't had to deal with that. However, you may know that GateHouse just purchased the company recently, and so I'm sure that will require all kinds of adjustments.

**OK. How have these changes that you've described helped or hindered your ability as a journalist to serve the public interest?**

Well, they've both helped and hindered. Having a digital platform to dispense news is a huge advantage for a newspaper that used to be tied to a 24-hour news cycle. And so we're now able to get news out immediately. Of course, everyone can, but it's a real advantage for newspapers.

On the flipside, reporters and editors and photographers, everybody involved in the newsgathering, now have to multitask and be able to do all kinds of things that they never had to do before. And so the job's more complicated. It's harder to train people. Morale is an issue because some people are good at multitasking, and others are not. And so the job has just become way more complex than it ever had to be in the old print days.

**OK. Do economic constraints in the newspaper industry have a bearing on freedom of the press?**

Yes. [Laugh.] Yes. I mean, the fear is that if there isn't enough revenue to continue to keep a newsroom alive, that there will be communities that have no major news outlet to rely on. And so there's a huge, huge problem that looms out there for not just newspapers but communities who could be facing life without a community newspaper, and that [pause] could strike a blow not just to the ability to get news and information but democracy itself.

**So, can you talk a little bit more about, specifically, what kind of effect that would have on democracy?**

Well, without any watchdog entity looking at what government's doing, government could ultimately have a lot more power than it has today to do whatever it wants to do. And really, newspapers, news organizations, but I think primarily newspapers, have carried the load for that watchdog function. So if the watchdog function is gone, government could grow way more powerful. And that's a scary thing for a lot of people.

**OK. So on this next question, I have a little bit of background. Your newspaper receives some government support: federal postal discounts, revenue from legal notices, various tax breaks designed for publishers, for example. Does this government support have a bearing on your newspaper's press freedom or on its ability to produce public-interest journalism?**

No, the answer is no. And I wouldn't consider any of that government support. You know, a legal ad is an advertisement. And it's just like any other advertisement. So there are no strings attached. So, I'm not sure exactly where the question's going, but I don't consider that any kind of government support that would have any kind of, create any kind of conflict of interest.

**OK. Next question: Do you consider journalism to be a public good? And what I mean by that is something society needs but that the private sector cannot provide on its own. So according to that definition, examples of public goods include education, medical research and infrastructure.**

I definitely think it's a public good, but it's for the most part created and provided by private enterprise. So, I'm not sure how to answer that question.

**OK.**

Does that make sense?

**Mmm-hmm. Yep. And then, so if the private sector were *unable* to sustain journalism, would the government have an obligation to provide funding to ensure that it persists?**

Hmm. No, I don't think so. I think what government would do would try to provide its own information. Which is what it does now. That's what news releases are. And so you'd still have, you'd have government trying to communicate more directly with its citizens. But I don't know that we would assume government would feel obligated to fund independent news organizations. If they did, they'd become an arm in the government anyway. Unless you're talking about some kind of government subsidy to a private, privately owned, company.

**Yeah. And that would be one of the possibilities. I mean, it's a very broad range. When we're talking about government financial support, there are so many possibilities.**

Sure. Sure. Yeah. But I think my original answer to the question still stands, is that any time you have government *subsidizing* any kind of journalistic enterprise, it's problematic.

**OK. On this next question, I have some background, too. So it's typical for newspapers worldwide to receive some form of government support. Most free-press countries offer newspapers benefits such as tax breaks and ad revenue, although these incentives are lowest in the United States. Many governments also offer newspapers grants to expand circulation or to support journalism quality. What kind of government financial support, if any, do you think your newspaper should receive?**

I don't think we should receive any.

**OK. And as you mentioned before, the indirect aid that they receive so far, you're not considering that government aid. Such as the legal notices and such?**

Uh – no.

**OK. But regarding the status quo, you're comfortable with that because, as you said – you said it doesn't appear to have any influence, right?**

It has no influence. But also, it's – they're paying for a service. So it's, you know, advertising. It's paid for. So they obviously feel there's a need to advertise for it. Now obviously there's lots of wrangling that goes on at the state level with whether that kind of legal advertising is required by government agencies. And so, I mean, you could get bogged down in that conversation about whether they feel compelled to do it by law and whether that constitutes some kind of pressure applied by newspapers. I mean, it's a – you could get into the weeds on that. But I still believe it's advertising. It's a service. And to a large extent, for many newspaper, it's mostly gone away anyway. There isn't a whole lot left of that kind of advertising. Some papers still have quite a bit.

**OK. Would additional government financial support bolster or threaten your newspaper's ability to produce journalism that serves the public interest?**



I'd say it would threaten it. Again, I can't, I just can't envision any scenario in which government support would be healthy.

**OK. Which financial model poses a bigger threat to public-interest journalism: corporate ownership of newspapers or government support for newspapers?**

Oh, I would have to say government support.

**OK. And I think you've been pretty explicit about why [chuckle]. So, OK. And then, although, I am curious as far as corporate ownership and – I guess, you know, you talked a little bit about the watchdog role and how, you know if, newspapers are tasked with holding the government accountable. How can they do that if they're receiving their funding from the government? Now, I'm curious how you feel about newspapers as a watchdog for corporations. Do you feel like there's – do you feel like the same type of scenario exists? Do you feel like they have influence over the newspapers' watchdog role?**

Yeah, I mean there's always danger of that, and I'm sure there are incidences where that's happened. But I think by and large, even large corporations that own newspapers to a large extent allow their newspapers to do what they need to do editorially. Now, that may vary from corporation to corporation, and that may involve some hopeful thinking on my part, having never been owned by a corporation before, other than a family-owned, independent one, which is very different. But certainly I'm sure there are times, and I certainly know of situations where there's been conflict there, where you have an owner who applies influence on the editorial product. But I think I'd still rather suffer that occasional episode, with a Big Brother government owning a big chunk of newspapers, which we've certainly seen in other countries, and it's not a pretty picture.

**OK. And prior to this interview, how much consideration had you given to government-supported journalism? And has your opinion ever shifted?**

I really haven't given much thought to it. And so, yeah, it hasn't changed.

### Appendix C.3: Interview 3, editor, corporate-owned newspaper

In-person interview, meeting space in respondent's newsroom; January 30, 2018

**So my first question has a little bit of background to it. As newspapers struggle to remain profitable, various proposals have been considered to financially sustain public-interest journalism. Among these are to create new revenue opportunities within the existing for-profit ownership model, to operate newspapers as nonprofit or low-profit organizations with support from foundations and other donors, and to accept greater financial support from government agencies. How do you think public-interest journalism should be funded?**

I think models like ProPublica, my understanding of what their funding is, have worked well. It offers an outlet and also a liberation almost to do really great investigation journalism that isn't tied to having to meet a bottom line. So it, I think, frees them from the grind and actually allows them to pursue hard-hitting journalism without having to produce the daily feed-the-beast stories that generate audience growth and sometimes eats up resources that would be devoted otherwise to groundbreaking enterprise journalism.

**Next, how has your news work changed since you assumed your current job, as well as over the course of your journalism career?**

[Laugh.] The short answer: a lot [smiling]. The long answer is, I started as a reporting working for The Associated Press, which is a news cooperative owned by the newspapers. And our charge was to, you know, cover the hell out of our area. I covered the Legislature and geographic areas, the cities. We basically did general reporting. Anything that was interesting. And we also had time to do more directed reporting. Not projects so much, but enterprise reporting off the day. And because we weren't a newspaper, we would take, I think, maybe more of a step-back look, which I thought also was a little bit more liberating than you would be writing for a very specific audience. You're writing for, you know, a national, regional audience. But we had to answer to New York [chuckle] and the general desk, and there was still a lot of push for production, and having stories that would reach a national audience, you would need to get on the A wire. So there's always a boss who wants good stories and is going to push you for that.

And I found that, you know, throughout all the models. And I worked also for a Gannett newspaper, corporately owned; I worked for The Register-Guard, independently owned; and for Advance, which is a corporation but is privately owned. So I would say the number of people, certainly, has fallen precipitously. The expectations for *just production* – and by that, not just number stories but also the surrounding parts of the story that other journalists used to provide – photographers, copy editors – those now have fallen on one editor to do all of the above. And before, there was much more of a shared experience and a team that would help produce the story. I mean, we still have that, but it's – reporters now are expected to be visual journalists, technologically ready to shoot video and photos, go on Facebook Live, and file also immediately and [inaudible] stories.

That's the other thing that probably has changed [pause] in the last 10 years [pause], just the demand for writing on a 24-hour cycle. We used to have what we called the luxury of getting a tip and vetting it more thoroughly than we do now. We get a tip, we want to be the first to post. Before, we'd be the first to publish, but we were on a publishing cycle

that would give us, you know, 12 hours, maybe sometimes longer, to go to all our sources, bring in other reporters, you go to a house and track people down, find them on the phone, find them at their business. But now, we do that either by phone or we do it on the fly. We might not get a story reported as thoroughly as we have in the past before we would publish it, and we would publish it online. So that is a skill we're still developing. And it's uncomfortable sometimes, I think. Things aren't cooked yet. You can see it with other media. You want to be responsible. You know, we still, I think, have high standards for accuracy and fairness. But it is, there's more pressure now to publish, and that, in addition to simply the workload and the versatility, the technological versatility that's required now, is much different.

I was watching, I went to see the "The Post." I don't know, have you seen that movie yet?

**Yeah, I have.**

But you know they had the hot type. [Chuckle.] And, uh – I was never in the newspaper business when that was still the way newspapers were put out. It was, we still had one of the first newspapers – well, I worked at The Associated Press first; we still had the teletype machines, but they were on their way out by the time I was there. And then when I worked at a newspaper for the first time after working at a wire service, we still had back room that put the copy on the page, and we would go back there and take out this paragraph and cut out this sentence and get out this widow, just so we could get it on the page. It was intensive production. But now, that's one of the other things that's changed. Things are centralized now, and so we don't have our own copy desk, the newspaper. We have copy editors, who go by a different name right now, which I can't remember [laugh] what the latest iteration of that name is. You know, they oversee the print production, but our, the hands-on putting together of the paper, the headline writing and the pagination, are done in New Orleans by a hub of copy editors that have never been to Portland as far as I know. Reporters – or copy editors, when we consolidated the desk into the hub in New Orleans, were offered jobs in New Orleans. But nobody took them up on moving. And so I frankly don't know who was copy editing and paginating. I don't deal with that at all.

One of the other changes has been the orientation away from print to online journalism. And we don't publish the paper – we don't deliver the paper seven days a week. We publish it seven days a week, but we only home-deliver four days a week. And the days that we don't deliver are bone thin. And, I mean, the number of pages are way down. And we try to keep our best journalism for our home delivery days, so the cycle of production also is a little bit different. And you know we're oriented to be digital first, which means as soon as we get a story, we publish it. We don't plan, as we did, stories for the front page. In the print edition, we are focused on doing the best, getting it first, telling it well online. And then, we do obviously some project reporting, which is both oriented online and in print. But in print, there's a finite resource. There's much more variety and more versatility to print a big story online than there is in the newspaper these days. And we are shifting toward that emphasis.

**OK. Great. And then, how have economic factors – such as staffing levels, mergers, revenue sources – influenced the way that your work has changed, like you described?**

I think you just have to do [inaudible] fewer stories. You may have higher benchmarks for the kinds of stories you're going to do. You know, we have had very strong community journalism. We used to have bureaus in all the suburban counties – Vancouver, Clackamas County, Washington County. They had full staffs of reporters and editors and advertising sales people and copy editors devoted to producing smaller weekly newspapers, essentially. And we have pulled all of our suburban coverage back. We used to have a separate Portland team that covered just Portland, you know. And it's, not just government but the people and the places and whatever was going on. At a pretty elemental level. But we don't do that anymore. And I feel what we've lost is, I mean, we're out of touch with those communities because we don't walk among them anymore. And so I feel like we are, more than I would like to be, at an arm's length to the community that we cover. I feel that we don't have our, you know, the old cliché of the finger on the pulse. I think it's much harder to do that because you're spread so thin.

We used to have a whole team of health reporters [inaudible]. We have one health reporter now, who is expected to do everything. And that [laughs], in some ways, because you can't possibly have the level of coverage you once did. You can liberate yourself from doing some of the pro forma things that you would do – some of the announcement stories, some of the things that hospitals call you up about and want you to cover another, latest opening of a building or naming of a building. In some ways, it is liberating because you *don't do those* anymore. That's not the kind of beat reporting that we have time for or that we would want to do. There's not an audience online for that. Hard to write an exciting headline, you know, necessarily. So we are given an out, and we have changed people's expectations about the level of coverage that we will offer. We still want those calls, though. We want to know what's going on. We want to be part of the conversation. But the more that you distance yourself from covering the things that you used to do just to get your name in the paper or online or in the door or to meet people and develop source, you're one step removed from that. So there's a, you know, a flipside to that liberation. But then it also helps you narrow your focus and go after the stories that you know are worthwhile and that are meaty and that will make a difference. But when you're the only person doing it, if you're the health reporter and you're onto a good story like our health reporter is, but there's a particularly bad flu season, and I have an editor who's asking me to keep on it, you know. And we've written the story [inaudible]. We've written the story about deaths. We've done a multimedia slide show on ways you can combat the flu symptoms, or where you should go, who you should contact, or what you should look for. You know, there is a constant demand for not just doing one story but doing it several different ways, and so the demand may not be [smile] from your sources from the bottom; it is from your bosses at the top, saying, you know, you have to keep up this pattern of daily coverage or being part of the conversation through multimedia, through social media, which distracts you from doing the bigger stories that you want to do or you find to be more journalistically interesting and valuable to the readership.

**OK. How you say that these changes that you've described have helped or hindered your ability to serve the public interest?**

I don't know that they've helped. I would say, you know, perhaps in some ways you are more conscious of what people want to read, and so from that standpoint, it may be more of a service. I think, in the old days when we had a lot of people and we often were our

own echo chamber, we thought we were doing stories that mattered. But we didn't really care. We were using our own judgment; we were talking amongst ourselves. I think there was a real push and dedication to doing stories we thought would matter and people would care about and we were uncovering a wrong or trying to right a wrong or expose a wrong. But now I think we are less in our own echo chamber and in more of an outward echo chamber [laugh]. The crazy free-for-all that is social media on the internet these days. And we get feedback much more quickly, much more *publicly*, and that does influence our choices and our reaction. And, you know, that can be *good* because you find out more about a subject in more real time, and you have very immediate sources. With names, you can track people down a lot more easily. You can get, I think, a wider spread of opinion more easily. I think that's good. At the same time, it can be crushing [chuckle] to try to keep up with it, and then to cut through the cacophony to the essence of the story. And I think sometimes you know we're like a dog with a squirrel; we'll go after whatever the latest hit parade is on the internet. And what I can cash on the audience. And we try to use our judgment [chuckle] and go after things that are interesting, important or fun, like we would in the past. But it is, it can be very distracting, and I think sometimes that does take away from your goal to do watchdog journalism or groundbreaking journalism.

**OK. Do economic constraints in the newspaper industry have a bearing on freedom of the press?**

[Pause.] I don't know how to answer that, honestly. I can tell you that I know that at the local level, we have cut back on travel. It is hard to sometimes cover a story regionally or nationally because you have to watch your travel budget. And, you know, is that *freedom* of the press? I think we still have the freedom to cover a story, but we don't have the ability to cover it as thoroughly and as deeply with somebody in the courtroom or at the scene than we would. So we have to rely on other sources.

You know, with our sports coverage – I shouldn't, I don't know for sure because I'm not clear how we get some of our information. But a lot of times, we won't travel with the team. You know, we'll watch it on TV because it's broadcast on cable TV, and we'll do it by watching it. But we're not there. Except maybe, you know, through a columnist, who is going to write about it later. But our daily coverage, you know, way scaled back. We have one photographer in the whole newsroom who is dedicated to doing photography, and now video, from a staff of – I don't know, God, I don't know how many reporters and editors we used to have when I first started.

I mean the shift in emphasis of the staff is quite interesting, too. We don't have the number of reporters that we used to, clearly. But part of that is not just, you know, not just strict one-for-one cutbacks. It is that we're having to hire people with other skills. We're hiring video producers and videographers who can capture the visuals, but that necessarily means that there's not a reporter who is providing the content for it. And that, I think, necessarily reduces the quality of the overall journalism and output of a newspaper, or media group, like we are.

**OK, so this one has a little bit of background, as well. Your newspaper receives some government support: federal postal discounts, revenue from legal notices, and various tax breaks designed for publishers, for example. Does this government support have a bearing on your newspaper's press freedom or on its ability to produce public-interest journalism?**

You know, I'm not aware of what the tax – what was the second one?

**The legal notices.**

Legal notices I'm aware of.

**And then the postal discounts. And also just some tax cuts for publishers. Tax incentives.**

I don't know about the tax incentives for publishers. It doesn't surprise me that we ask for [pause] revenue. And earn revenue from posting legal notices. Although [laugh], I have to say that's not very much, very lucrative these days, if it ever was. And I'm not aware of what the postal discounts are. It doesn't surprise me that we get them. I'm assuming that they're offered to other big businesses with the, you know, volume business. But I don't know. And I suppose that that I don't know is a sign that it doesn't influence me. It wouldn't change anything about how we cover the Postal Service or the government that is taking out a legal notice in the newspaper. It would make no difference in how or why we would cover a story.

**OK.**

What are the publisher discounts?

**I don't really know exactly how those subsidies work, exactly. I just know there are – and that is definitely an example where you'll find things like that for other companies, as well, and it's not exclusive to journalism or to newspapers. But it does exist, but it does exist for corporations.**

You know, one of the things that's always been a tradition in all the newspaper or media companies that I've worked for is that there is a bright line between the business section, the business operations of the newspaper or even the website, and the content production and gathering, the reporting and editing. There have been very few instances that I can think of. Except we've [chuckle], I can remember one time at, I think [name of Oregon newspaper], we did a story about the car dealerships, and they were a big advertiser, and I think – my gosh, I can't remember honestly what the fallout was from that. I knew that it was, that there was a blowback, but it didn't affect me. It didn't change the way we did the reporting. And I wasn't [inaudible] to the fact that doing a story about a practice by the, a car dealership might come back to the publisher's office. But he never talked to us about it. And, you know, and that was very few and far between. I can't remember anything that – whew, I'm 57, and I started reporting when I was in college, you know, so more than 35 years in the business. I can't think of any instance when I was asked to change *anything* because of the business operation, any content.

**OK. Do you consider journalism to be a public good. And what I mean by that is something society needs but that the private sector cannot provide on its own? So, per this definition, some examples of public goods include education, medical research and infrastructure.**

[Pause.] I mean, I got into this business because I thought journalism was a way to provide a public good. To protect our Constitution and the First Amendment. And we have *incredible* press freedoms that have been provided by the Constitution and upheld by the courts. I mean, we're unique in the world for that. And I read the newspaper growing up. My dad was a journalism professor. I had him for class when I was in college. And I read the paper every day. We discussed it every day. It was a place where we found out about our neighborhood, our city, our state, the world around us. When I was growing up, that was how we found out about life and the world around you. You know, it's much different now because of the internet; there are many other sources. But my era of growing up was this is the way you tell truth to power, and you are an

independent voice for people who don't have a voice. You also can ask questions and find entrée to places where, you know, public people can't.

[Chuckle.] I'm only smiling because, this is incredible to me, but one of my reporters is back to work today for the first time in four weeks, maybe it's five weeks now. He, on New Year's Day, somebody opened a car door on him. He was on his bike, and he broke a rib and his collar bone; he had to have surgery. And in all the craziness, he didn't get the guy's name who opened the car door on him. You know, the guy was wonderful, concerned, called 911, and [name] was whisked off in an ambulance. And he'd like to find the guy. And he tried to get – and the, I don't know if it was a private ambulance company that came to take him to the hospital, and I think the fire department also responded. Nobody got the guy's name. There is a 911 call though, and I believe that 911 requires you, or asks you, to give your identification. But [name] can't get that 911 tape as a private citizen. It's not allowed. A lawyer can get it for you, but a private citizen can't get a 911 call. We as the media can make a public-records request and get that 911 call. That to me is a very simple but profound example of how we provide a public good. We are the stand-in for the people who can't advocate or fight government on their own [smile].

**OK. A little background on this next one, too. So, it's typical for newspapers worldwide to receive some form of government support. Most free-press countries offer newspapers benefits such as tax breaks and ad revenue, although these incentives are lowest in the United States. Many governments also offer newspapers grants to expand circulation or to support journalism quality. What kind of government financial support, if any, do you think your newspaper should receive?**

I don't think they should receive any editorial government support. [Pause.] I think, I can't speak for the business side, because I simply am not aware of what's typical for other big businesses. But the United States has a huge, well, it's built on a free press. And the anathema of that would be to have a state-run or state-subsidized media. I think that government is a monolithic bureaucracy. There are shield laws that *states* adopt, but there's not a shield law that I know of in the federal government. And they have abused their authority and power to try to ferret out leaks. They've, they wiretapped The Associated Press phone calls a few years ago. There have been some widespread abuses. They've tried to compel reporters to give testimony or give up notes. I think that there has to be a huge wall between the editorial content and decisions made by newspaper level versus government.

Now, that said, NPR and the television counterpart seem to have a following that accepts that it's, that their editorial content is independent from the subsidies they get from the government. But they also, my understanding is, get contributions from the public. But newspapers don't and haven't traditionally done that, so I think that to do that now, I don't know if readers would accept that independence of newspapers if that happened. It's just not a tradition.

There is VOA. I have a friend who works for Voice of America. But they're not really a national entity like BBC or NPR. They're more outward facing to the rest of the world, I think. They have an incredibly diverse and widespread workforce throughout the world. But in the United States, all they have – White House correspondents and people who are stationed not just in D.C. but elsewhere – I don't get the sense that they have any iota [smile] of the influence or readership that NPR does, for example. And I think that they

worry [chuckle] about their longevity in the face of whatever administration is in power, and that's not a good place to be either.

**OK. Would additional government financial support bolster or threaten your newspaper's ability to produce journalism that serves the public interest? And you touched on it a little –**

Yeah, I think that it would necessarily [pause] make readers suspicious of the independence of our reporting and writing. And decision making.

**OK. You know, one thing I'm curious about with making readers suspicious based on government funding, I'm curious what your thoughts are about other forms of funding, other revenue sources – whether they're private revenue sources or wherever that's coming from – if you feel like there is a similar sentiment, like, what they're, you know advertising – it's long been subsidized that way, you know. Do you feel like people – do you think that readers have the suspicion that, oh, you know, there's advertiser funding so they can't be independent, or oh, there's shareholder funding so they can't be independent?**

Right. Oh, yeah. We get that, I would say, more now than we used to. I think during the Watergate era, when newspapers were seen as you're fighting the good fight and holding government's and politicians' feet to the fire and rooting out corruption, that there was more of a we're all in this together, and there was more support in general for newspapers, [inaudible] newspapers. I think now, people believe, depending upon [chuckle] who you're talking to, if we have a conservative editorial board or we have a liberal editorial board; we're corporately owned, and so we are slaves to the corporate control and whims, and we have no local control, and somebody's pulling the strings. You know, there's much more suspicion and conspiracy theories now about newspapers and the content they provide because those are the times, they're much more, people are much more suspicious, and they're consumers of "news," in air quotes, that fits their idea or their political view or political world. They don't like to do homework, and I think newspapers in general are still homework for people. And if you want to try to find the independent source, that you are not going to try to subscribe to newspapers anymore because they don't speak your language.

**And you had mentioned, when we were talking about government funding, you said that you think it would be hard for readers to accept that because it's not what's traditional. And then, when you mentioned the other, you know, the suspicion they might have, the concerns they might have about funding sources. Do you feel like the fact that the public funding, the government funding being something out of the ordinary makes it even harder to digest?**

Yeah, I think that people generally, including journalists, are suspicious of change. And [chuckles] right now we've covered it, very close to the bone with the Malheur refuge takeover. Maybe it's possibly because we're in the West, and there is a big – I don't know how big it is – there is a *vocal* movement that has targeted what proponents call government overreach. And the government owns vast expanses of land in the West, and they control how it's used. And that's become a flashpoint among some of the people and families for generations who have worked the land, and that has become, you know, a pretty big [pause] criticism and *movement* against *federal* government, in particular. And the proponents want local control, local sheriffs, obviously [smile], or county commissions to decide what to do with the land in their jurisdiction. And I kind of think that [smile] that's the way a lot of people would think if the government had a major financial hand or control of the newspaper, that they would be under the thumb, and we would be, regardless of – because newspapers right now are considered to be biased.



Reporters are considered to be biased. You can't possibly check your personal biases at the door when you walk in. We work very hard to be fair and accurate and cover issues from many points of view, and to convey the complications of a story and the depth of a story, but people, I think, in the world that we live in have a tendency to read into what they want of the story regardless of your protestations [chuckle] and examples and practices to the contrary. And they'll find something online or in another publication that speaks more clearly to their political point of view. So instead of actually doing research or trying to find out what's happening from a mainstream media source, there are more and more people who are finding other outlets that feed their worldview.

**OK. And so as far as – just backing up a little bit to what you were saying about readers' perceptions and stuff – do you share that point of view, as far as your concerns about interference from the government, government overreach, if it got involved in newspaper funding?**

I would say it would be an experiment that I would watch very closely as somebody from inside the industry. I wouldn't say it would be bad out of hand. As I said, you know, there are, I think, good examples, like National Public Radio and the, what is it, Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Those enrich my life, and I do listen to them and watch them. And I think my life as just a private citizen would be less rich for having those gone. But as a journalist, not having experienced that, I would [chuckle], I would have not necessarily fear but a healthy skepticism and, you know – look, we're corporately owned, and we have always touted local control. But the pragmatic reality is that our overall goals are set in New Jersey. They, the corporate parent, sets audience growth goals, they set video viewing goals, they buy new products like polling and video production tools and photography tools that they want us to use, and we are rated on that, and so yes, [chuckle] I've been asked to do a poll once a week on a story on my team. And so yeah, they, my strings get pulled plenty by my bosses, and I would think that no matter who my boss would be, that would be the case. In the government? I would wonder what political angle we were fulfilling rather than just trying to increase our circulation numbers so we can stay in business and are able to charge a certain rate for our product. And that I said "product" scares me [chuckle], because I never would have said that 20 years ago.

**[Chuckle.] Right. OK. That leads into my next question. Which financial model poses a bigger threat to public-interest journalism: corporate ownership of newspapers or government support for newspapers?**

I don't know if I would describe it as a threat. It's a business. You've gotta have – we're privately owned. I mean [inaudible] for-profit business; we want to make money. I am particularly ignorant, frankly, of how we do that because there is a very tall wall between – and always has been in my experience – between the business side and the news gathering side. And I'm comfortable with that. I know that. I find that it works, and it has worked for centuries. And certainly here, for more than 100 years, in Portland.

The government, I don't know how that would work. I know from friends' experience how that works, and they exercise independent control over content decisions [smile]. You know, one of the things that newspaper reporters and editors always say when we're accused of controlling the news or message is we didn't have time for conspiracies. We're just trying to get our arms around all the incoming stories – the news releases, the tips, the emails, the tweets, and the texts that we get every day. So trying to diabolically plan to sway the newsroom one way or the other wouldn't happen. And I don't know if

that's the case [inaudible] if there were major government control. But I just know that in my experience, having been on the other side and covering government, that it's much bigger, it's more Byzantine, and the abuses in government far outweigh the abuses that newspapers have been guilty of.

Which is – in watching “The Post,” too, one of the things I thought that they brought up very honestly was how newspapers often, for newspaper owners who are decision makers, often cultivated friendships with people in high places and certainly were influenced and didn't cover the Kennedys, in this case, or Robert McNamara and the Vietnam War as they should. And so yes, there are different degrees of corruption or bad decision making when personal friendships and politics become involved. So I would be, I would have some skepticism.

**OK. I have just one more question here. So, prior to this interview, how much consideration had you given to government-supported journalism? And has your opinion ever shifted?**

I've only really considered it from my personal experience and that of friends who have worked for different entities. And I've never had any experience with government-subsidized journalism. So, you know, I haven't given it a lot of thought. I have given a lot of thought to longevity of newspapers and journalism as I know it. And I haven't worried about the funding model as much as I have just providing good stories that reflect the community and keep an eye on what people in power are doing and how that relates to the community around us.

## **Appendix C.4: Interview 4, editor, family-owned newspaper**

Phone interview; February 1, 2018

**With the first question I have for you, there's a little bit of background that I'm going to give you first. So, as newspapers struggle to remain profitable, various proposals have been considered to financially sustain public-interest journalism. Among these are to create new revenue opportunities within the existing for-profit ownership model, to operate newspapers as nonprofit or low-profit organizations with support from foundations and other donors, and to accept greater financial support from government agencies. How do you think public-interest journalism should be funded today?**

Hmmm. How do I think it should be funded? So, by, meaning?

**So, should we remain with the status quo where most news organizations producing public interest journalism are privately owned or publicly owned, but they're for profit. There are some nonprofits out there. Should we see more of that, where a lot of their funding comes not from shareholders but from foundations or grants. Or should we be seeing more money from the government? Or should we see more money coming from other sources that I didn't even talk about?**

So, personally, I would hope we would see more of them be nonprofit. And that's because I feel like the more that we can be our own entity and not connected to some, say, a family, that owned quite a bit of things in an area, so there are all sorts of potential conflicts in that particular situation as there would be with a corporate agency. I also think that money tends to make people greedy. So, as a detriment of the newspaper and the quality of the newspapers and journalism, they will cut pay, cut people and not make producing quality products a priority.

**Now, about your work, how has your news work changed since you assumed your current job, as well as over the course of your journalism career?**

How has it changed?

Yes.

From the beginning of my career to now? Is that what you're looking at?

**Yeah, and just also in the job that you have now.**

Huh. OK, so the way that I've seen newspapers change over two decades plus that I've been in newspapers has certainly been where you have, say, multiple people covering a similar topic. We'll just use cops and courts. So you might have a newspaper where you would, you used to have three different reporters. One would cover courts, and one would cover the city, and one would cover the county. And that would offer the most complete coverage of all of those agencies, of all of the activities – the crimes, the people overcoming adversities, the investigations, the opportunity to dive into public records, those kinds of things. And then as time has just gone on, there's been fewer people to cover a large, like a broader base of topics.

So, for example, in my career, I was at one point covering education in two states, K-12 and higher ed, and then also doing health, and I would do some crime, and I would do social services. That's the best that a person can do covering that broad of a range of topics is just triage on what comes up, what you must cover and then hope that you find some joy and some fun things along the way but that you're also serving as a watchdog

that [inaudible]. Because that is one of the most important roles we as journalists play is making sure that we hold those government agencies accountable.

Now, my job [identifying information] – and I work at a smaller newspaper in a smaller city, one of the reasons I chose to come here – and it's family owned and I was previously at a family owned paper – this is a paper that has put the priority where I said I hope a nonprofit would be able to, on the news product that we produce. And so, that to me was very important. And it became, like, your progression in your career as a journalist – feel free to stop me if I'm going on too long, Monica [chuckle] – it used to be that your progression was to go to a bigger and bigger paper, but what I came to realize is those bigger papers weren't necessarily doing the best that they can do; they were doing with what they could survive with. And that's probably not the case in every situation, but the [newspaper name] here was to me a standout, in Oregon, because it put a priority on health news and editorial page, and we have a thriving features section, and we have an entertainment magazine, and we really do a lot for our community.

And as the editor, I am not writing as much, although I still chip in if I convince my staff to do a major project, so I'll chip in as much as I can. But I have so much opportunity to do great with – the people that supervise me, like the owner and the publisher and our editor, they say if you can accomplish it, go for it. And so that's the freedom that I very much enjoy having because I'm the kind of person who laughs at somebody who says they don't have the ability to do it or the time; I just say you can make the time. So, that's me.

**How about more of your, just kind of your daily tasks, your role – the actual work that you are doing on a daily basis, has that evolved at all since you've started the job you're in now? Has that evolved at all?**

Has it evolved at all?

**Yeah.**

How it's changed, and I don't know if you'd call this evolution or de-evolution, is that I am having to pull a lot more wire stories.

So there was a point where I redesigned all of our features sections, and we have a six-days-a-week features sections. And they're themed, so we have a food and fashion section, and then we have a science and technology, outdoor life, health, travel and we call it Living and Giving, which is like philanthropic [inaudible] life in the community. And so as things have changed, like we've lost a reporter, a health reporter, so I've had to use some wire content in my health section. We had to temporarily suspend our travel writer, so I've had to use – who's a freelancer – so I've had to use wire in that section. And when I redesigned those sections, I was frustrated with a high turnover on our copy desk, not giving, not finding the best wire content they could possibly find. Like, for example, looking for stuff that was really, be of interest to our community. Instead just finding the easiest thing they could find. And I would hear a lot of, you know, "I can't" or "There isn't." And when I started doing my own searches, there was. And so I started pulling wire content, which is not a thing that the editors of the sections usually do. So that's one thing that has definitely changed. Is that what you're talking about?

**Yes.**

I mean, I've also designed sections, and that's not something that I ever thought I had the ability to do, but I think I'm intuitive about what it is that people want to read, I think.

**OK. So, how have economic factors, such as staffing levels, which you mentioned a little bit – mergers, revenue sources, that sort of thing – influenced the way your work has changed?**

I think the way I answered the last question kind of went over that. So, we as a community newspaper, we know that local is our bread and butter. So it pains me to have to use national stories when I could use a local story. And that's where, if we had a stream of revenue that was not dependent on advertisers but rather on grants or some other kind of funding, then I think you'd be able to keep that consistency of local content.

**And then in your last answer, you talked about how one of the reasons for the changes, for you doing more of the wire content rather than the copy desk, you attribute that to high turnover on the copy desk. Is that something that you would connect with economic factors at all, or is that related to something different?**

No, it's completely economic.

**OK.**

That, and we work for a smaller newspaper. But I think, you know, so many newspapers are in this stagnant period and have been for at least the last five years, if not the last 10 years, where nobody has had raises. And you can't bring people in, expecting them to stay, if you're not going to pay them more after a year or two of excellent work. And so, it's economic.

**OK. And then, how have these changes that you've talked about helped or hindered your ability as a journalist to serve the public interest? I know you talked about local vs. broader content for one thing, but can you talk more about that?**

I think that another way to describe how it hurts is that if you don't have as many people out there in the community, digging up stories, pounding the pavement, engaging, then your community starts to lose touch with your newspaper. You see it in places where [pause]. So if it's like – I'll go back to the example of covering education in two states. I mean, if you're doing that, then they don't have a face or a person to – not every agency has, every school district, every, you know, everyone who's in that coverage area, they don't all have a face to put to the name, and they don't know who to call to tell things, and then you don't have your whistleblowers who might call you, and you don't have – you just, you really, in order to do the best job at supporting the news, you really have to be someone who is engaging the community. You're out there, you're talking to them, you're meeting with them. You're at the meetings, you're at the events, all of it.

**OK. And then, so do you see any advantages, in terms of helping the public interest, the changes that you've experienced, at all?**

Advantages? [Inaudible.]

I'm sorry?

Staying in business [chuckle]. Yeah.

**And that has an impact on public interest by having the paper there. Is that what you mean?**

Right.

**OK.**

I mean, the worst thing that could happen is that we would go away.

**OK.**

You know, I guess I just have this sneaking feeling that if newspapers were gone, everyone would run amok or something. I don't know.

**OK. And then, do economic constraints in the newspaper industry have a bearing on freedom of the press?**

[Pause.] Hmm. How do I answer that? If by freedom of the press [pause]. So, I'm thinking more in terms of, there are legal battles we can't fight anymore. There are, we have to pick and choose which ones we're gonna fight. We used to request bundles of records. We can't afford to. So, is that what you're getting at?

**Yeah, I think that's a very fair point.**

You know, this is a small example, but we have probably the most seasoned arts and culture reporter in the state because most veteran reporters are gone, like at the Statesman Journal, we were blessed with Ron Cowan. You know? He could have written arts and culture for the entire state. Well, my arts and culture reporter has been doing it for 17 years, and last year, I started the tradition of sending him to the Shakespeare festival, because I remember how wonderful it was to have that kind of review that we had back in the day. We have the space, we have the opportunity. And this year we couldn't do that. And so, that takes away, I mean that's a big arts/culture event in our community that now nobody's going to go and do a review. Well, maybe, maybe the Ashland newspaper will do [inaudible].

**OK. So, for this next question, I have a little bit of background. So, your newspaper receives some government support: federal postal discounts, revenue from legal notices, and various tax breaks designed for publishers, for example. Does this government support have a bearing on your newspaper's press freedom or on its ability to produce public-interest journalism?**

[Pause.] I suppose I wouldn't really know that. But I could see how – I mean, we've been publishing legal notices, newspapers have been publishing legal notices for years and years and years. And I've never seen that begin to impact our reporting. So, on that, I would say no. The tax breaks for a publisher seems kind of personal, so I don't think so. I think, no I don't think that either. And then what was the third one? Oh, the postal thing?

**Yeah, those are just a few of the examples. Postal discounts, and then legal notices and tax breaks.**

Yeah, I don't – I mean. Even in more contentious situations, conflicting situations, like my previous paper, [name of paper], we did a really good job of separating what the publisher did and got from what we reported on, so.

**OK.**

Now, if we were owned by, say, GE? I mean, I think that would be entirely different.

**In what way?**

If we did anything wrong, I think we'd hesitate for fear of losing our revenue. You can't do that.

**I see. OK. So next question: Do you consider journalism to be a public good? And what I mean by that is something that society needs but the private sector cannot provide on its own. So according to this definition, examples of public goods include education, medical research and infrastructure.**

My answer, is journalism, does it do a public good? Absolutely, 100 percent, yes. I think that yes, we do things that the public won't do themselves because people tend to gravitate toward – and we've seen it more now than ever – what it is that they naturally believe instead of considering the objective version of what it is that they need to know. I think in order to make informed decisions, you have to consider both sides. And not only consider what it is you lean towards.

In terms of medical research, can we do our own medical research? I don't think we should do that. But I think that for a seasoned reporter, which would have a very seasoned reporter in health, dumbing down, if you will, medical research that we should really understand is a great benefit. Yeah.

**OK. And so, to broaden that a little – beyond just whether we could do it on our own, more like is it something that – you know, if journalist were private, in the private sector across the board, is that something that could sustain journalism? Or do we need public support for it?**

Do you mean like if people didn't subscribe to it?

Well, I mean, for example, medical research for example. You know, it's – there are private companies that do fund medical research, but we don't rely 100 percent on that. We also, you know, medical research relies heavily on grants from the government, for example, or it relies on foundations and that sort of thing. So it's not coming entirely from the private sector. Same with infrastructure. Obviously, our government, because they consider that a public good, contributes greatly to infrastructure.

If we were private and we could provide our product for free [chuckle] because it was funded otherwise, I think that would be a great benefit to people.

**OK. And then, for this next question, I have a little bit of background here, too. It's typical for newspapers worldwide to receive some form of government support. Most free-press countries offer newspapers benefits such as tax breaks and ad revenue, although these incentives are lowest in the United States. Many governments also offer newspapers grants to expand circulation or to support journalism quality. What kind of government financial support, if any, do you think your newspaper should receive?**

[Pause.] I don't think it should receive any – OK, grants. I think we should get grants. And they should be arts, type of, like, non-affiliated, no-strings-attached kind of grants. But I don't know where those come from.

**Is it something similar to, for example – I'm drawing a blank with the name of the government agency that provides grants to arts projects and stuff.**

Like the Endowment for the Arts, or something?

**Yes, exactly. Thank you. Is that kind of what you're thinking?**

Yes, I am. Like here's the money to do what you do well. Do it, and we won't interfere.

**OK. So that would be contingent on not interfering in content?**

Correct.

**OK. And then, would additional government financial support bolster or threaten your newspaper's ability to produce journalism that serves the public interest?**

Again, it would depend on how hands-off they were. The other thing, too, is that you, if you're affiliated with – say, for example, one of the biggest corporations we have here, or companies is [name of local company], right? And say that they gave us, OK we're going

to give you \$100,000 to hire, you know, two reporters for a year, or something like that, right?

**Right.**

Say, for example, that they did that, and then everyone who knew that would then assume that they, you know, we were in their pocket, that we would do whatever they say. So that would influence, yes, that would influence our journalism, if not directly then indirectly.

**OK. So, I want to back up a little bit to the first question then. Because you mentioned when I asked you how you think journalism, public-interest journalism, should be funded, the model that you were talking about was nonprofit. And it sounded like it was a lot because you, there weren't as many connections or wasn't as much influence. However, you know, nonprofits are funded through private donations and foundations and stuff like that. Do you feel like that would have the same influence as, like, a company like you just described or a government saying, you know, we'll give you money for this. You were talking a little bit about the perception of being ...**

Yeah, it is perception. I guess where those donations would have to come from private funders that remained anonymous, you know. Like Jimmy Buffett.

**So do you think that the anonymity would actually be helpful? So it would be helpful because ...**

Perception.

**Because of perception, as opposed to transparency? I mean, would – so transparency of it, would that give any perception that, oh, they're trying to do the right thing by saying where this is coming from? I guess what I'm saying is would there be a perception of hiding anything by not being transparent?**

Yeah. Yeah, that could be a problem. [Pause.] I haven't really thought through a nonprofit model, so I don't –

**Sure. OK. And then, which financial model poses a bigger threat to public-interest journalism: corporate ownership of newspapers or government support for newspapers?**

Huh. [Pause.] There is not a good answer for that. [Pause.] We've seen what corporate ownership does, you know. Gannett. GateHouse. And so on. One of the reasons I gravitated toward family owned was because it wasn't corporate owned. [Pause.] But would they stay afloat? Yeah. Corporate owned [pause] vs. government owned? [Pause.]

**Not necessarily government owned, but government supported.**

Again, you know, if it was government supported, it would depend on what agency in the government.

**Right. So are you saying that either way, there's potential for stakeholders to influence?**

Yeah. There is.

**OK. Last question: Prior to this interview, how much consideration had you given to government-supported journalism? And has your opinion ever shifted?**

I hadn't given any thought to government-supported journalism, no. So therefore my opinion couldn't shift. [Chuckle.]

**Right. OK. [Chuckle.]**

**Is there anything along the lines of what we've talked about in this interview that you'd like to add? Is there anything that I didn't give you a chance to talk about that was on your mind, regarding this**



**type of stuff that we were talking about? If not, that's fine. If there happened to be something you couldn't fit in under one of those questions, I just wanted to give you an opportunity.**

I just, I will say that what journalists do, we do for the public good. A lot of dedicated people trying to inform and educate and watchdog. And it's unfortunate that so much doubt has been created and [inaudible] so many one-sided journalists out there, kind of bending the truth. I just think that makes traditional newspapers more important.

## **Appendix C.5: Interview 5, producer, corporate-owned newspaper**

Skype interview; February 5, 2018

**So, the first question I'm going to ask you has a little bit of background. So, I'll give you that first.**

OK.

**As newspapers struggle to remain profitable, various proposals have been considered to financially sustain public-interest journalism. Among these are to create new revenue opportunities within the existing for-profit ownership model, to operate newspapers as nonprofit or low-profit organizations with support from foundations and other donors, and to accept greater financial support from government agencies. How do you think public-interest journalism should be funded today?**

[Pause.] I personally think all of the models have their pluses and minuses. And the one that we are currently mostly using, the for-profit model that you mentioned, while it's currently the most stable, I could see it being supplemented by some sort of foundation or nonprofit setup. I think, like, most journalists, off the top of my head without a better description of what a government-based or public, you know, funded journalism would look like, I would be leery of that. Although, I know some people who work for Voice of America and are very happy about it.

OK.

Did that answer it?

**Absolutely. So now, I want to focus a little more on your job specifically. So how has your news work changed since you assumed your current job, as well as over the course of your journalism career?**

Well, I started out as an informational graphic artist, just doing maps and charts and things like that. So it's changed a lot. Currently I'm what's called a digital content producer, so I work on the website, but I also split my week working on the print product. So I'm doing both print and Web right now. I'm not, I rarely do graphics. I am doing, using the skills that I've learned there to do social media items or help put together the paper on a design and production level. The job that I have today is nothing like the job I had when I started out. And it's nothing like the job I had when I started at [name of current newspaper].

**OK. Can you tell me a little more, beyond the skills that you're using, how has the work itself changed, or the demands, that sort of thing?**

Well, when I first started, I was copy desk and page design. So most of my, the demands on me were to, towards taking a story and getting it in the paper. Now, my demands are all over the place. I work on special projects where I am not the project manager, but I might be a de facto project manager because I am the person that gets the stories and the photos and has to figure out the best way to present them. For print, we use an entirely different model now that's less focused on the individual pieces – copy editing a story, selecting the right photo – than it is in moving those pieces onto the production people, who are offsite, who put the actual paper together. Does that kind of make sense?

Yeah.

OK.

**So, how have economic factors – such as staffing levels, mergers and revenue sources – influenced the way your work has changed?**

Well, as you probably know, we laid off 11 people last week.

**Yes, I know. [Soft sigh.]**

Every time we have a layoff, it changes my job in some capacity. In this particular one, I don't know yet what it's going to do, but I've been told it's going to change. The last layoff resulted in my doing more print work. So basically, every time there's a layoff, people who have multiple skills in our room are called upon to do additional things or to stop doing old things and start doing new things.

**OK. And how have these changes to your work helped or hindered your ability as a journalist to serve the public interest?**

Well, I think the economic changes that have hindered our abilities as journalists *in general*, and me specifically, in the sense that our audience is smaller, they're less interested in taking the time to look at what we're doing. In general; this is just my feeling. You know, people want their news faster, and they want it, you know, in more different delivery methods than what we are currently supporting, I think. And I think that the loss of audience impacts journalism as a communications tool, and certainly therefore some of the things that used to be really important in your job to make sure to get right for the people who are going to read it aren't so important to get right. And it's more important to be, you know, sometimes – the example I would give is, with breaking news, it's more important to be fast than to be correct, whereas there used to be a period where getting it right was as important as being fast.

**OK. So this – OK. I'm sorry. I started to skip one. Do economic constraints in the newspaper industry have a bearing on freedom of the press?**

Well, given that we live in a capitalist society, you know, based on economic exchange of goods, I think yes. If we don't have an economic base or economic stability, then we can't deliver the product or the information that we're trying to do.

**And then in this next question, I have a little background first. So, your newspaper receives some government support: federal postal discounts, revenue from legal notices, and various tax breaks designed for publishers, for example. Does this government support have a bearing on your newspaper's press freedom or on its ability to produce public-interest journalism?**

No. I don't think it does. Within the newsroom, particularly the items you just mentioned, are never discussed as we have to do this in order to support that. Especially since a lot of communities now don't even have the legal publication requirement they once had. It's like everything else seen as something that we should pay attention to in our business side but don't necessarily have to tailor our journalism to reflect.

**OK.**

But if you know somebody who can get us more legal ads, send them our way.

**[Laugh.] OK, so, do you consider journalism to be a public good? And what I mean by that is something society needs but that the private sector cannot provide on its own. So according to this definition, examples of public goods include education, medical research and infrastructure.**

You are saying that those things are primarily government sponsored?

**Not necessarily government sponsored, but that the private sector cannot provide it on its own.**

Well, I wouldn't necessarily agree that that list is that way. I think, for example, medical research, you see very little medical research these days coming out of government. Most of it comes out of private companies.

**True. Although [muffled; spoken simultaneously with response] there are grants –**

And even colleges that do it are getting support from private companies and benefactors. So, you know, I think clearly there isn't a solid line between public good and private, private ownership in the way you're describing it here. And I think – I'm trying to get back where the question was – do I think the current level is – what was the first question? So –

**Would you consider it a public good based on the definition of public good that I'm using is something society needs but that the private sector cannot provide on its own.**

I think the private sector could provide it on its own if it chose to, if it could find an economic model like we once had. You know, 30, 40 years ago, we wouldn't even be talking about whether we needed foundations or government support. The ad revenue was supporting mostly private newsgathering. So I think, you know, in the current situation we are in now, I don't – I think we do provide a public good, and I think it can be *done* privately. I think people have to want it, though, to be private. If everybody suddenly said, hey, let's have a referendum and have a universal tax to support journalism, and that's what they wanted to do, I think we'd find ways to not be restricted by that. But I also think that would have as many pitfalls as the current system.

**OK. So, if the private sector were *unable* to sustain journalism, would the government have an obligation to provide funding to ensure that it persists?**

Well, I would hope so. But I don't, personally, I think the government, I would rather see that than, I don't know, another set of aircraft carriers. But does it *need* to? Must it? I don't know that it must.

OK.

Am I coming even close to what you're looking for here?

Yeah. Yeah.

OK.

**I'm going to give you a little more background on this next question, too. It's typical for newspapers worldwide to receive some form of government support. Most free-press countries offer newspapers benefits such as tax breaks and ad revenue, although these incentives are lowest in the United States. Many governments also offer newspapers grants to expand circulation or to support journalism quality. What kind of government financial support, if any, do you think your newspaper should receive?**

Well, I think we should receive the same kind of tax breaks and benefits that other companies receive, which I think we do at this point. You know, if we had all our cash stashed overseas and wanted to bring it back, I would hope we get the same opportunities as other companies. Does the government need to provide anything above and beyond what regular corporations get? Like I said, I would hope *not*. But given the current market structure, if they did, I also don't think it would have a huge effect on how we did our journalism.

OK.

I'm, I guess I'm a little confused about some of the premise here, in that [pause] whether you're talking about – These are such abstract concepts that it's difficult to pin down how I feel about yes or no. I mean, if you were to tell me that NPR or public television was being fully funded and nobody in Congress was trying to raise an issue about them every time Grover used a bad word, I'd be fine with that. I have no problem with that. I have problems with them saying we're going to give you this money, you can do what you want, and then the next week they come back and say, no wait, don't do that, you know. And this is a very broad use of some of these public, private concepts, it's tough to say how I would feel about it until I actually had more information about how it was being structured. Does that make sense?

**Yeah, absolutely. And do you think – just based on what you just said, that there are – it sounded like you were basically saying, you know, there's a lot of politics involved when you're talking about government funding. And so, do you feel like that would be an issue no matter what *type* of funding was coming from the government? You specifically mentioned the public broadcasting model. But do you think that would apply in other circumstances, as well, whether it were grants or endowments or, you know, stuff like that?**

I can't personally imagine a scenario where public grants or government money would be given to anybody – for medical research or journalism or building highways – and not be some politics and oversight involved in it.

**OK.**

Now, whether it would be in the business end of the company or in the newsgathering end of it is difficult to say. But again, given our past experience with the government and its desire to come back 40 years later and politicize something it's been funding for ages, I would say at some point somebody would step in and say, hey, you can't report this because we're giving you money.

**OK. OK. Would additional government financial support bolster or threaten your newspaper's ability to produce journalism that serves the public interest?**

If they were to give us a grant, you know, to do journalism and – I mean, it's [chuckle] very likely we would take it and we would try to make the best use of it. And I think it could expand what we're currently doing. If it was a sustainable thing where it could be used to fund a couple new positions, *yeah*, we'd take that. But like I said, if it turned out it came with a lot of strings attached, I think there would be a lot of discussion as to exactly how well we, how much we could do with it, or where we could best use it. We lost the woman last week who does our weekly pets of the week gallery. So, if they want to give us funding to hire somebody to do that, I'm all for it.

**OK [smile]. Which financial model poses a bigger threat to public-interest journalism: corporate ownership of newspapers or government support for newspapers?**

[Pause.] Again, I don't think this is an either/or question. I think there are gray areas in both of these. I mean, I've worked for a number of different newspaper corporations, and they've had a number of levels of involvement in the actual production of the journalism. And I would suspect a government model would also have some of the same factors.

**OK. Prior to this interview, how much consideration had you given to government-supported journalism? And has your opinion ever shifted?**

Oh, I've, I mean, we discussed it in college. I've thought about it over the years, different times, read articles, talked to people a little bit off and on. Ah, where was it? I remember one night, ages ago, we had a long conversation about whether or not the newspaper should be funded like NPR. We didn't resolve it [smile].

[Laugh.]

But, I mean, the sustainability or survivability of free press is something I think about quite a bit because, you know, I worry that 30 years from now, my kids are really going to have to hunt to find the kind of journalism that we do today.

**Now, I just want to invite you to, I mean, if there's anything that came to mind about this conversation that we just had, along those lines, that I didn't ask you a question where you specifically could answer that, I just want to invite you to add anything else you'd like to add. Not required, just –**

Well, just in thinking about this while we've been talking, like – and I've mentioned this, I think, a little bit – I do think any kind, however you fund your journalism, whether it's private or public or a mix of the two or foundations or tech billionaires throwing their money out there at you, there are slippery slopes. And there are dangers. But I think the key is that everybody has to want it. And that's the problem we're having now, I think, with the decline of journalism in the last 30 years – or 20 years or whatever; I guess it's been in decline 30 years. Yeah, when I was in college, they told us that we wouldn't have careers at the end of our lives.

**Oh, wow.**

Well, I had a couple professors say that. But, you know, there's always a couple that want to cause a problem.

[Chuckle.]

I think the journalism is important to society, to who we are, to people, to individuals. But I think it is a fight every day to finance it in such a way that it remains free and open, and available. That's the one thing that we don't often talk about. Government ownership, would it influence what we do? But government ownership, would it influence who we reach? That, to me, has been a huge part of my job in the last 30 years, and the part that I probably worry about as much as anything.

## **Appendix C.6: Interview 6, producer, corporate-owned newspaper**

Phone interview; February 16, 2018

**As newspapers struggle to remain profitable, various proposals have been considered to financially sustain public-interest journalism. Among these are to create new revenue opportunities within the existing for-profit ownership model, to operate newspapers as nonprofit or low-profit organizations with support from foundations and other donors, and to accept greater financial support from government agencies. How do you think public-interest journalism should be funded today?**

Can you repeat the middle part of that question?

**Yeah. So, some of the possibilities are to create new revenue opportunities within the existing for-profit ownership model, to operate newspapers as nonprofit or low-profit organizations with support from foundations and other donors, and to accept greater financial support from government agencies. So those are just some of the examples of, you know, a broad range of possibilities for reforming newspapers or funding newspapers. So, considering those, or anything else that you know about or can think of, how do you think public-interest journalism should be funded?**

That's a tough question to answer. But I don't think there's one specific way because I think it's been proven that it can be funded multiple ways without having the public-interest journalism portion of it run into some conflicts. Like you see at ProPublica, it's a nonprofit, and they do a lot of great projects, a lot of great special-interest projects. But you also see places like the L.A. and New York Times, where they are for-profit. But I don't think that changes the way they approach their work. And I can say the same about where I work. I don't think our business model changes our approach or attitude toward news gathering; it doesn't affect us in any way, shape or form. At least to my knowledge. I can only speak for myself and for the colleagues I work closely with. So, I know that's not the best answer. [Chuckle.] But I think there are more, there are multiple ways to do this.

**OK. And how has your news work changed since you assumed your current job, as well as over the course of your journalism career?**

Since I have – So the question is from where I began to where I am now, right?

**Yeah, so in your current job specifically. But also in your whole career, if that is different, as well.**

In terms of a shift in responsibility, of course there's going to be some staff turnover due to new career opportunities and things like that. For other staffers, I've had to take on a little more responsibility here and there, but I don't see that as a burden. I kind of see that as new opportunities. So I guess you can say there are expanded responsibilities. I'm more able to get my hands into more storytelling ideas, kind of impact how we tell stories a little more than [inaudible] I first began. And I think that's just a natural progression the longer you stay at any job. So from a job perspective, that's where I am. But in terms of a journalism perspective, from when I began, it's a lot more kind of focus on the writing and less on working with a digital product as a whole. So I guess, I guess that's the primary shift of change that I can kind of highlight. In terms of that, yeah [chuckle]. I've worked for relatively digital-friendly companies before this. I can't really say there's much change.

**OK. [Chuckle.] How have economic factors – such as staffing levels, mergers and revenue sources – influenced the way your work has changed?**

[Pause.] So, it's hard for me to compare it relatively, relative to any other organization or any other place I've worked because this is the first newsroom of smaller proportion that I've been in. And it may just be more kind of work here and there that I'm used to, that I maybe expected. Because with a smaller staff, of course you're obligated and you're expected to – and I'm more than happy to – pick up the slack. Because only so many people can work hourly. And when someone runs out of hours, you have to pick up their work here and there. Nothing too large. Nothing that I cannot do. But I think that does relate to staffing, how you're funded, because with a paper this large and a community this big, I don't think you can make a budgetary argument that we need this, this, this many people when the trade-off or payoff is not as large as it may be in a metro area like Indianapolis or Phoenix.

**OK. How have the changes to your work that you've talked to me about helped or hindered your ability as a journalist to serve the public interest?**

[Pause.] I think, I don't think it's hindered my ability to serve the public interest at all. I think it's helped because it's put more emphasis on digital, reaching larger audiences, so when I do make editorial decisions or when I do build stories, I have, I'm very cognizant of how is this going to help the public, how will this impact the larger audience and the larger community around me. So, I think it puts more of an emphasis or stress on, kind of, making stories matter, and making news matter.

**OK. Do economic constraints in the newspaper industry have a bearing on freedom of the press?**

Just in general or [inaudible]?

I'm sorry?

Is that just a general question?

**Yeah. Just in general.**

OK. [Pause.] I do think to an extent it does because a lot of news organizations can't adequately fund staff, so in turn you have understaffed newsrooms and you can't really do the investigative work that may be necessary to do watchdog journalism or public-interest journalism. So I think, I think across the field, the journalism field, there *are* challenges.

**OK. And do you think that that – Would you say that that's an impact more on serving the public interest or on freedom of the press?**

I think that, so you would say, so the question is does the economic have more impact on public interest or freedom of the press?

**So, what you were just describing, the underfunding and how that limits the type of watchdog coverage and stuff you can do, would you characterize that as a restriction on, or a limitation of, freedom of the press? Or would you characterize more as a limitation on your ability to serve the public interest?**

I think it's the latter because, yeah, in my opinion I think it's the latter. You can make the argument that it's shrinking freedom of the press. But to me, freedom of the press is a legal thing where there are legal constraints, but here it's more of an economic constraint. And some of the onus does have to fall on the news organization to profit. At least the for-profit organizations. So, I think there's a little bit of a trade-off there, but I would say it's more of a public-service issue rather than a freedom-of-the-press issue.



**OK. I have some background for this next question. Your newspaper receives some government support: federal postal discounts, revenue from legal notices, and various tax breaks designed for publishers, for example. Does this government support have a bearing on your newspaper's press freedom or on its ability to produce public-interest journalism?**

I don't believe it does. I – I don't. From my own personal experience, I don't.

**OK. And why not?**

Because – Again, I can only speak for myself, and I'm pretty sure my colleagues' attitude reflect the same, but we just don't take that into account when report or when we build stories.

**OK. Do you consider journalism to be a public good? And what I mean by that is something society needs but that the private sector cannot provide on its own. So according to this definition, examples of public goods include education, medical research and infrastructure.**

Yes, I do think it is. I think we do provide the public with a service. We provide them with knowledge and information that, although the private sector theoretically could provide, have no interest in doing.

**OK. And then if the private sector were unable to sustain journalism, would the government have an obligation to provide funding to ensure that it persists?**

I believe yes. But – [Pause.] Yeah, looking at the reality of it, that might run into some conflicts, especially from the government end.

**OK. So, I'm going to give you some background on this next one, too. It's typical for newspapers worldwide to receive some form of government support. Most free-press countries offer newspapers benefits such as tax breaks and ad revenue, although these incentives are lowest in the United States. Many governments also offer newspapers grants to expand circulation or to support journalism quality. What kind of government financial support, if any, do you think that your newspaper should receive?**

[Pause.] That's a tough question because of my previous answer. [Pause.] I have no real answer to that one. I apologize.

**That's OK. Do you think additional government financial support would bolster or threaten your newspaper's ability to produce journalism that serves the public interest?**

No.

**You said no?**

No, yeah.

**And why not? [Pause.] It wouldn't bolster or threaten? Or, I'm sorry, could you just elaborate on that?**

Oh. Oh, OK. For bolster? OK. I'm sorry, I thought you meant. I only heard –

**No, that's all right. That's OK.**

I do think it would – I do think it would bolster it, much like any funding would, because you do have the flexibility to pursue more interesting stories in more interesting ways. So, I think there's that aspect of it.

**OK. Which financial model poses a bigger threat to public-interest journalism: corporate ownership of newspapers or government support for newspapers?**

[Pause.] When you say government support, is that completely supported by the government? Or?

**Not necessarily. That's a really good question. So that could mean anything that I talked to you about earlier. That could mean tax breaks. That could mean more ad revenue from the government. It could mean grants from the government. It could mean a lot of different things.**

I hate to be, I hate to be indecisive again. But I think on both ends, you run into some issues. Some *possible* issues. In theory, neither would be any sort of conflict. But in practice, I feel at some point, you'd run into some snags. Not with me and my newsroom personally, but considering journalism's track record, I think that you'd run into at least [inaudible] conflicts with both sides. So. I hate to give a non-answer again, but –

**No. No. These are questions that are [chuckle] pretty hard to wrap your head around when it's not something you're experiencing, so I understand that. And then prior to this interview, how much consideration had you given to government-supported journalism? And has your opinion ever shifted?**

[Pause.] I haven't given it much thought. Government-supported journalism in general, I haven't given it much thought, prior to this interview. And what was the follow-up? I'm sorry.

**And has your opinion ever shifted? Usually – it probably hasn't if you haven't given it much thought prior to this. [Chuckle.]**

Yeah, it hasn't.

**No, that's fine. OK. So, that was my last question. Unless – I want to give you the opportunity to add anything based on what we've been talking about. If there's anything that's going through your mind that I didn't ask specifically, please feel free to talk about it. But if not, that's OK. [Chuckle.]**

[Chuckle.] Nothing off the top of my head. Yeah, I don't really have anything to add.

**OK. No problem.**

## **Appendix C.7: Interview 7, producer, family-owned newspaper**

Phone interview; January 31, 2018

**The first questions involves a little bit of background. As newspapers struggle to remain profitable, various proposals have been considered to financially sustain public-interest journalism. Among these are to create new revenue opportunities within the existing for-profit ownership model, to operate newspapers as nonprofit or low-profit organizations with support from foundations and other donors, and to accept greater financial support from government agencies. How do you think public-interest journalism should be funded today?**

Well, I think it is vital that it be funded by interests that do not benefit positively or negatively, really, from what it is that we publish. And so I think most independent form and hands-off form is the best form. So what that is, obviously, is still up in the air, but I would not think, for example, that governments [chuckle] are uninterested parties. That, to me, would be a very slippery slope in the same way that corporations would be a very slippery slope. I think that the benefit of a subscription model, obviously, is that you have people who are interested in receiving the news that you produce but not interested in controlling the news that you produce, or don't have a stake in what news that you produce. So you – but you specifically want me to address which of the three that you mentioned would be the least onerous?

**Well, those are some examples. So, what do you think might be – I mean, whether it's among those examples, or just something else that you're drawing from with your own experience or your own ideas. What *would* be a good way to fund public-interest journalism?**

I mean, I think advertising is a tried-and-true method that has worked in the sense that money can flow from that direction, but we're also seeing that not enough money flows from that direction. So, to me, outreach to public citizens or community groups might be a good avenue.

**OK. And then, how has your news work changed since you assumed your current job, as well as over the course of your journalism career?**

My news work?

Yes.

OK, that's kind of a broad question. So, I'm going to start on an answer here, but if you feel like I'm heading down the wrong street with this, feel free to redirect me.

**OK, sure.**

So, 15 years ago when I started at [name of newspaper], there were very, very clear lines between advertising and news departments, and it was very easy for the news department to say no to the advertising department. In terms of separation of where ads were in the paper or online. In terms of information that, you know, advertisers might want to get. In terms of how we package things. And what I've seen is this steady regression of power in the newsroom to be able to fend off advertising as it becomes more and more vital for us to receive funding from whatever means we can simply to stay afloat. So I've watched – 15 years ago, we were a very profitable paper, and we are now fighting for our life. So it – our relationship to the dollar has changed, really accentuating the point of your question, I think, which is, what in the world are we going to do to fund newspapers so

that they stay afloat in a means that they can operate free of control by entities outside of them?

**OK. And what about more along the lines of kind of your day to day duties or responsibilities? How has that changed over the course of your career? I mean, the way you work.**

Well, the way I personally work has changed considerably because our emphasis has shifted so amazingly toward a digital presence from a print presence. So again, in the 15 years that I've been at [name of newspaper], we were so heavily a print paper in the early 2000s. And we are moving exponentially toward a digital paper. And the print keeps getting smaller, and the digital presence keeps getting larger. So the actual technical way that I do my job and the way that we promote stories has really fundamentally changed because of the different format. So really, two different formats because I would say that, you know, we have to talk about print, and we have to talk about social media, and we have to talk about our actual website. And so where absolutely the bulk of the energy used to go to print, we are now at this point kind of dealing – [pause] oh, I don't know, 40 percent print, 40 percent digital, 20 percent social media. I mean, there's a lot of energy that goes off into using social media to promote our work.

**Right. OK. And my next question, you started to answer already in your previous response. I don't know if you have anything to add. How have economic factors – such as staffing levels, mergers, revenue sources – influenced the ways your work has changed? So, you talked about how vital it is now to fend off interests from advertising and how the lines used to be clearer between the advertising department and news. Is there anything else you can say about how the economy has affected – or economic conditions have affected your work?**

Well, I would say beyond what I already addressed, which is how we handle things when we're writing about them and we're actually publishing stories, there's a difference in how much we cover. You know, that we have less people to do the same coverage area where the population has really blown up. So, in the last 25 years, the population of our area has gone from 20,000 to 90,000. And so we've seen an, just an enormous growth in terms of our population. And our community has changed considerably. There's so much more to cover. But in that same amount of time, our staffing levels have gone the other direction. So it isn't just how we cover it; it's what we cover gets reduced. We have less people on the ground, paying attention to what's happening locally.

**OK. Do you think the economic constraints in the newspaper industry have a bearing on freedom of the press?**

[Pause.] Well, I think that's a dicey question. I mean [sigh], maybe literally not, but yes [chuckles] in terms of the reality of it. I mean, we're still free to cover these things, but we're less able to cover as many.

There is one other aspect, I think, that bears commenting on. And that is as we become a more litigious society, we see in particular public agencies really holding their cards to their vests and not wanting to share information that we've been able to get readily from them in the past. So, school districts and police departments and local governments try very hard not to share with the press all sorts of things that are going on that seemed a little easier to get in the past. And we are less able to threaten litigation [chuckle] than we used to be, because we used to have some money to do so. But now we've, they've kind of pulled the teeth out the dog here, so that's another problem.

**OK. So, just go back a little to the changes you were talking about with your news work. How have those changes helped or hindered your ability as a journalist to serve the public interest?**

[Pause.] I guess I would just go back to that notion that it is in the public interest to know as much as possible about what's happening in their community, in particular with their government and with agencies that essentially control quality of life and lifestyle and decision-making in communities. And the more that this information is available to the people, the better. So, what has changed in the last 15 years is there's a whole lot of new ways for people to reach people. You can send information via Twitter; you can send it via Facebook; you can, you know, people can come online and view your website, and they can take your print publication. So the formats make it easier to reach people. The lack of staffing make it a little more difficult to reach people.

The other thing is there is a proliferation of other kinds of information out there sometimes being confused with what we do. So, lots of bloggers, lots of, I would say less qualified individuals, less vetted individuals supplying information to the community, in competition with us but not necessarily on a level playing field.

**OK. So with this next question, I have a little bit of background on this one, too. So, your newspaper receives some government support: federal postal discounts, revenue from legal notices, and various tax breaks designed for publishers, for example. Does this government support have a bearing on your newspaper's press freedom or on its ability to produce public-interest journalism?**

Well, if it does, I don't feel like I have seen it. And that said, that revenue has been so important. I have not seen, I can't say that I've seen an instance where we've pulled back from anything based on worry about funding from those sources.

**Do you consider journalism to be a public good? And what I mean by that is something society needs but that the private sector cannot provide on its own? So according to this definition of public good, examples include education, medical research and infrastructure.**

[Pause.] I, wow. I feel like I really have to think about that. I definitely consider it a public good. Do I consider it a public good in the way that *you* just described? I'm not sure I do. Because I think the private sector *has* been able to supply in the past, and because I am nervous about the notion that the press would be a piece of the government. That seems very, very scary to me. I – would rather that it remained its own pillar. So I do think it's a matter of public good, and it absolutely makes me quake to think that it's being diminished. I mean, I'm sure you're aware that The Register-Guard was just bought by GateHouse, and it seems to me that we will have much less local coverage coming out of that part of the state once they really make changes there. And I find that frightening. But do I think that in that regard it should come under somehow the Oregon Department of News, like the Oregon Department of Transportation? I'm not sure that I see that as the solution, so I hesitate to jump into that analysis and say yes, it's a public good in that way.

**OK. Do you feel like –**

Does that address what –

**It does. And I'm just curious with – so I guess like education and infrastructure, you've got the Department of Transportation, the Department of Education. Medical research might be a little bit different because there is private funding and there's also grants and stuff that go to that. So if you look at it more in that respect rather than Department of News, does that change anything at all?**

Mmm. [Pause. Chuckle.] I think yes, it makes it less onerous. But it also does not clean it up completely. I mean, when I think of what medical researchers have to do to attempt to be funded by grants, and how shaky that can be and how it can come and go based on the whims of whoever seems to be in charge at that particular time, it does not give me a whole lot more confidence.

**OK. Would additional government financial support bolster or threaten your ability – your newspaper’s ability to produce journalism that serves the public interest?**

It would just have to depend on how stable that support was, what it was contingent upon, and what one had to do to apply for and keep it.

**OK. Which financial model poses a bigger threat to public-interest journalism: corporate ownership of newspapers or government support for newspapers?**

[Laugh. Sigh. Pause.] I honestly don’t know. I think it’s possible that – they’re both bad. [Pause.] I think to say the government would be a better choice is just to be a Pollyanna.

**OK.**

I wish it were true. I don’t think it’s true.

**OK. Prior to this interview, how much consideration had you given to government-supported journalism? And has your opinion ever shifted?**

I don’t think I’ve considered it very much. I think my focus in terms of funding this paper has been, as I mentioned before, relying on the community, community-based support, support of individuals, and I have not focused very much on government funding at all. What was the second part of your question?

**Has your opinion ever shifted. Although, if you haven’t thought much about it [chuckle] –**

[Chuckle.] No. It went from none to none. Yeah. [Chuckle.]

## **Appendix C.8: Interview 8, producer, family-owned newspaper**

Phone interview; January 31, 2018

**So the first question, I've got a little bit of background that I'll give you before I ask you the question. So, as newspapers struggle to remain profitable, various proposals have been considered to financially sustain public-interest journalism. Among these are to create new revenue opportunities within the existing for-profit ownership model, to operate newspapers as nonprofit or low-profit organizations with support from foundations and other donors, and to accept greater financial support from government agencies. How do you think public-interest journalism should be funded today?**

Wow. That is a good question. I kind of like the idea of a nonprofit, like making it a nonprofit entity to some extent. I worked for an online newspaper that, it was not a nonprofit, but it worked with a lot with foundations to produce in-depth stories and multimedia to – that, you know, that would focus on larger-picture issues. And so it was, they were definitely, it was a partnership. And the way it was presented, the sponsors would kind of be at the top of the story and everything. But they didn't have any say in the content itself, and how it was written or what was reported, but they had an interest in pursuing certain topics. I think one that we did was homelessness, and one was on drug addiction or something. Anyway, and I, it was, I don't know, I thought it was an interesting approach, and it seemed to work really well. So I think that's an interesting idea. Yeah.

**OK. Great. How has your news work changed since you assumed your current job, as well as over the course of your entire journalism career?**

Well, when I first started, I was much more of just a copy editor. We would get content and edit it, and there would, you know, there would be some design involved and headline writing. But it's definitely become, there's a much bigger workload, and my work covers many different parts of the paper. It used to be focused largely on news. Now it's everything: features, business, plus city/region, wire, all of that. There's also a bigger focus on digital content. So we also manage the website now, and there's also multimedia aspects. So it's definitely, it's not only evolved in what we do but how much we have to do. It's definitely a bigger workload.

**How have economic factors – such as staffing levels, mergers, revenue sources – influenced the way your work has changed?**

Well, I think that it's partly the workload is so big because our staffing has been reduced a lot because of financial pressures. And, so as the – we used to have separate desks. We had a news desk and a features desk and a sports desk. And now, we're not quite universal but pretty close to it. We've merged kind of into one. Sports is the only one that's separate. And so we, the staffing levels have gone down, so our workload has gone up. I think that's probably just the most obvious difference. I can't necessarily think of anything else, for me in particular.

**All right. Have these changes to your work hindered or helped your ability as a journalist to serve the public interest?**

I think in some ways, the switch to digital and the bigger emphasis on digital now has *helped* because we're able to get information to people a lot faster. In the event of

breaking news, we can put it up immediately and send out an alert, and people have that information. In some ways it's hindered it just because our workload is so heavy, you don't quite get as much time to really work with a story and massage it and make it better. But, you know, that's just one part of it. I think that there have been some advantages. So it's kind of – it kind of goes both ways, I guess.

**OK. Do economic constraints in the newspaper industry have a bearing on freedom of the press?**

[Pause.] Probably. I'd have to think about that a little bit. But it probably depends on the news organization. [Pause.] Yeah, that's kind of a tough question for me because I feel like, at least in my particular area, the newspaper that I work for, I don't feel like it's affected us any in that respect other than, you know, we just don't have the resources to pursue stories the way that we used to. But it's not necessarily a freedom of the press issue. It's just a resource, staffing issue. I imagine that might be the case for bigger organizations. But at least with my experience, I don't think that it's affected that. We still put in, we still put in public information requests as needed. We still pursue stories that we find of interest like we used to. So, I don't – I don't think in that way it's directly affected at least [inaudible; trails off].

**OK. So, with this next question, I have a little bit of background here, too. Your newspaper receives some government support: federal postal discounts, revenue from legal notices, and various tax breaks designed for publishers, for example. Does this government support have a bearing on your newspaper's press freedom or on its ability to produce public-interest journalism?**

I do not believe that it does. I mean, I think the revenue is probably nice. But I don't think that it directly affects specifically the work that we publish. At this point.

**OK. Do you consider journalism to be a public good? And what I mean by that is something society needs but that the private sector cannot provide on its own. So according to this definition, examples of public goods include education, medical research and infrastructure.**

What was the second part of that question? That the private sector could not provide?

**Right. So the definition of public good that I'm giving you is that it's something that society needs but that the private sector can't provide on its own.**

Oh, on its own. Yeah, I think that – Can you read the whole question again? I'm sorry.

**Sure. No problem. Do you consider journalism to be a public good, meaning something society needs but that the private sector cannot provide on its own? Per this definition, examples of public goods include education, medical research and infrastructure.**

Yeah, I do think that it's important. I do think that it's definitely part of the public good, and I mean I think they can work in partnership. But I don't think that it's something that it can be done alone through the private sector.

**OK. So, on this next one, I also have some background here. So, it's typical for newspapers worldwide to receive some form of government support. Most free-press countries offer newspapers benefits such as tax breaks and ad revenue, although these incentives are lowest in the United States. Many governments also offer newspapers grants to expand circulation or to support journalism quality. What kind of government financial support, if any, do you think your newspaper should receive?**

Well, I think, I think the tax breaks are probably important. I like the idea of grant funding, similar to community block grants or something along those lines. Because it is, I think newspapers do serve the public. There's a public service aspect to it. I believe that



they're important to informing the public and that they're, you know, that in some ways affects the government. You know, we run stories about city councils and state government, and we get that information out to residents that, you know, in a way that I think is efficient and unbiased. So, I'm not exactly sure about specific breaks other than, you know, maybe tax breaks, grant funding, things along those lines.

**OK. Great. So, would additional government financial support bolster or threaten your newspaper's ability to produce journalism that serves the public interest?**

I think it would bolster it as long as there weren't, there wasn't partisanship involved. As long as the newspaper was able to function independently and without pressures to write certain stories or write them in a certain way, then it would definitely bolster it.

**Which financial model poses a bigger threat to public-interest journalism: corporate ownership of newspapers or government support of newspapers?**

Hmm. I want to say corporate ownership because I think they can have a heavier hand in how things are done. But that, I say that with the expectation that the government would not be involved [laugh] in what was being produced. So as long as – like I said, my last answer – as long as there wasn't any partisanship involved or any government mandates, things along those lines that would affect the work being done, then I think that government funding would be better. Sometimes I think corporate ownership, they can, they dictate how things are covered, and so there's – I don't know, I think it could go both ways. But I'd like to think government funding would be a good way of doing it. And it could ensure some stability.

**OK. And prior to this interview, how much consideration had you given to government-supported journalism? And has your opinion ever shifted?**

I have not given it much thought, actually. Sorry about that. [Laugh.]

**No, that's all right.**

But, and I don't think that it really has shifted. But it's fascinating to talk about it. And I'll probably give it more thought now.

## Appendix C.9: Interview 9, reporter, corporate-owned newspaper

Phone interview; February 2, 2018

**The first question I'm going to ask you has a little bit of background. As newspapers struggle to remain profitable, various proposals have been considered to financially sustain public-interest journalism. Among these are to create new revenue opportunities within the existing for-profit ownership model, to operate newspapers as nonprofit or low-profit organizations with support from foundations and other donors, and to accept greater financial support from government agencies. How do you think public-interest journalism should be funded today?**

That's kind of the question that we're all throwing around these days. I mean, personally, I think that there is room in the Pacific Northwest, especially, to support newspapers through some sort of nonprofit model backed by, ideally, a large financial endowment from a wealthy individual. I think that, you know, while public broadcasting and public, public radio gets a small portion of its operating expense from, you know, through the federal government, it's not something that I think would be a good solution for a newspaper model or an online media model. You know, I just, it's not something that I could get behind. So I think that having some sort of NPR-related model that works for a like metro newspaper or something that I think would work. And unfortunately, we're not in a place where we can do that because of our owners.

**OK. So, regarding that you said the public broadcasting model would not necessarily be suitable for newspapers, can you expound on that a little bit?**

No, I think there *would* be. I think there *would* be, aside from – I just don't think, I don't think that public media is beholden to any government interest. There is a public service component. I don't know off the top of my head. I mean, the vast majority of their resources comes from listeners. But, but, I mean [pause], I think the level of investigative reporting traditionally done at metro newspapers is more expansive and more critical and needs to be finely separated. There needs to be a hard line in there, in my opinion.

**OK.**

But I think we could ask for money. Like, we don't ask for money. We never ask for support. I mean, we poisoned our brand through terrible decisions by management – our corporate management to be clear, not local editorial management. And, you know, go back five or six years, you know, if we were to ask for money and put up a paywall and ask for people to read our, to pay to read our content online and give them ample reason to do so, I think people would respond. Portland in particular, we have two alternative weeklies that are still, you know – I can't claim to know their financials, but they're holding on and they do good work. And we have a public broadcasting, public radio wing that is supported by the community. And then we have, you know – supported by the community in pretty dramatic ways. Then we have a metro newspaper with by far the largest staff, and we don't ask [chuckle], and the biggest reach, and we're not what we were 20 years ago. But we never asked for money. And I think that's to our detriment.

**OK. So you mentioned paywalls, and you said maybe, like, five years ago, if your paper had taken that approach, maybe things would be better. But are you suggesting that at this point – is it too late for for-profit news organizations to explore that at this point?**

I don't know. I'm feeling, it's a question that's a little raw right now, given that we just had our sixth or seventh round of layoffs in the last six or seven years. But I think the paywall model is clearly working for newspapers around the country, not just – not just the Post and the Times. You know, I think that there is room in the Pacific Northwest, and Portland and Seattle specifically – well, The Seattle Times is doing it – for, you know, people will pay for quality enterprise and investigative reporting and local reporting that they feel they can't get anywhere else. And the problem is, you know, if you cut your staff to the bone, can you still rationalize, will people still step up and support? I don't know. And if we do good work, I think people will.

[Pause.]

**Are you still there?**

I am.

**OK. Sorry. Now, a little more about your job. How has your news work changed since you assumed your current job, as well as over the course of your journalism career?**

Well, since – well, my current job, I cover two large, statewide beats. That's something that, you know, wasn't something our organization had three years previously, let alone five or 10 years previously. There used to be teams of reporters doing my job. So that's a new thing for me and for our organization. I mean, I've changed beats many times. I've – but my daily, you know, I just, it's changed a lot. And then since I've been here, you know, obviously when you lose a lot of staff, other people are, even if you're not asked to pick up more duties, I think it's only human nature that people see a hole and want to fill it. And so I'm certainly not the only person who has seen that happen over the last however many years, but – yeah, so I guess just more responsibilities. [Chuckle.] No more time in the day.

**OK. And then this next question you've answered in part. But how have economic factors – such as staffing levels, which you mentioned; mergers; revenue sources – influenced the ways your work has changed?**

I think it's changed it quite a bit. And I mean, there is a sense of – [inaudible] with goals, workplace goals that are placed on you from higher-ups that include both traditional production levels in terms of number of enterprise stories or impactful work on your beats, but then there's also traffic goals that you're, that are part of your, you know, part of how you're judged. And not the only thing that you're judged on, but it's something that you're judged on. So you feel that you, you try to think of – you don't think of it in every story, but it's certainly important to think of will this be something that will resonate with our digital operations folks? Will this, do they think this is something that will get a lot of play? So that's something that – that is a calculus that you face, and it's not all the time, but it's something that you think about.

**OK.**

And I don't know if that answered the question. I'm sorry. I'm –

**No, that's – I think that's –**

It's been a long week. [Chuckle.]

**That's all right. I think that's good. And then, how have these changes to your work helped or hindered your ability as a journalist to serve the public interest?**

I think it's really – Most of the changes, I would say, have only hindered my ability to do work that serves the public good because I am [pause; sigh], I am relied upon to produce more and more work to fill the, you know, to fill the newspaper, where there – You just lose the time and the ability to do work that makes you feel really good and, you know, that will actually result in positive changes. I mean, I'm not on the investigative team, so I don't have six or nine months or a year to work on a project and have a team of staffers at my, you know, to work with. So I'm more of a – I think a lot of newsrooms, especially as they get smaller, there is a sense of focusing on, investigative work is really important, but it also takes time. And then there's a separate part of the newsroom that doesn't have that time and might have to pick up the burden, and, you know, there's a give and take there.

**OK. [Pause.]**

But I don't think readers are served. Because, you know, there's just – there's not enough attention. You know, I used to cover – I don't know. I know this is confidential. I'm sure some of this would, whatever. If someone read it, they could probably determine that – . I used to cover the metro area, City Hall, and I was part of a team of people to do that. And then after we had another round of layoffs, we only had one person covering the city. That's a big disservice. That's another set of eyeballs that are not there. That's another person picking up the phone and calling and seeing what's going on downtown. That's just another set of feet not out pounding the pavement. And nobody benefits from that in terms of the community. It's just, I think, it's a huge disservice to readers.

**OK. Do you think that, do you think there are any advantages in terms of serving the public, the public interest that have resulted from these changes in your work?**

No.

**OK.**

Nah. I mean, in my personal work, I don't see any changes in terms of, like, from a metro newspaper specifically, none of the changes that are happening are – I mean I guess, access of information. Like, I'm sorry; everything is super raw right now. People have more access to information than they ever have right now. So I guess that is the positive thing, for sure. I don't want to – you have a bigger platform than you ever did before in terms of the ability on social media to reach out to folks. I think that is a positive thing, generally speaking [chuckle]. You know, there's an ability to communicate directly with readers.

But it comes down to just not having enough time or resources at your disposal to do the work that, that really would be impactful. That's not to say that you're not able to do impactful work, because we do tremendously good work. I want to be clear about that. It's just frustrating to see the, you know, it's frustrating when you're feeling like you're swimming upstream and you are only able to occasionally come up for air and do something that really resonates.

**Do you say – let's see. Do economic constraints in the newspaper industry have a bearing on freedom of the press?**

[Pause.] That's a good question. [Pause.] I mean, people – if people aren't able to be informed about, about the – You know, I don't know about the – nobody's placing any constraints. I guess that – I don't know. That's an interesting philosophical question.

Like, are, you know, like, because billionaires who are looking for 25 percent profit year over year on a product that they slashed to the bone, and they're not getting it, does that, is that a dynamic where they're curtailing freedom of the press? I don't know. Or is that just business being business? I guess that's in the eye of the beholder. But, you know, I've never – to be clear, in my career in either public broadcasting or in corporately owned metro newspaper, I've never been told not to do a story because it would offend X, Y or Z or piss off shareholders in X, Y or Z company. I've never, ever been told that. So I think that there's –

That's one thing that's kind of frustrating. People talk about the corporate media, or bla bla bla, like we're beholden to them. When in reality we have a bunch of people who are making [inaudible] to middle-income salaries and are never once told not to do a story. Aside from the rare examples, obviously Las Vegas and Sheldon Adelson. But that's an anomaly, which is a good thing in our, given the systemic issues that we do have, at least. I've never once been told not to write a story because it would affect our business interests. And so, I think that kind of ties into your question a little bit.

**Yeah. OK. So for this next question, I have a little bit of background. Your newspaper receives some government support: federal postal discounts, revenue from legal notices, and various tax breaks designed for publishers, for example. Does this government support have a bearing on your newspaper's press freedom or on its ability to produce public-interest journalism?**

You're breaking news to me there. I didn't know that. I don't think so. I guess, I don't know how you would be, how you would operate any organization without government influence. Like if you're a nonprofit, you're not paying property taxes on your building or something. Does that mean you're not, that you're getting a sweet, sweetheart deal from the government? I don't know. So I think you could look at it that way, as well. But I don't know that that has any bearing on our mission or our ability to serve the public. But that's an interesting point. I wasn't aware of that.

**OK. OK. Do you consider journalism to be a public good? And what I mean by that is something society needs but that the private sector cannot provide on its own. So according to this definition, examples of public goods include education, medical research and infrastructure.**

So, should we have like a BBC type thing? Or Voice of America; that's like a national thing. I mean, it's certainly a public service. I don't know that I would go as far as getting into that definition that it's a public good. I think I would say it's a public service. I think it's absolutely essential to our democracy and to an informed citizenry. And I can't imagine, you know, it's just frustrating to be where we're at in terms of metro newspapers specifically. And it's super frustrating. But it is, I don't know that it fits that definition of a public good. Look how we fund our schools and our infrastructure.

[Chuckle.] Do we want to be included in that? I guess we're already there then if you look at it that way.

[Chuckle.] OK.

Man, I'm cynical. [Laugh.]

[Laugh.] Yeah, well you're a journalist, so –

Well, I'm a journalist, and you're also calling me after seven consecutive years of layoffs. So I'm a little fired up right now.

Yeah. Sure. [Laugh.] OK.

This is therapy. Could I bill my therapist [inaudible]?

[Laugh.] **OK. So I have a little more background on this next question, too. It's typical for newspapers worldwide to receive some form of government support. Most free-press countries offer newspapers benefits such as tax breaks and ad revenue, although these incentives are lowest in the United States. Many governments also offer newspapers grants to expand circulation or to support journalism quality. What kind of government financial support, if any, do you think your newspaper should receive?**

[Pause.] Yeah, I guess I haven't, I haven't given this topic enough thought. I mean, I think our country has enough issues right now that we don't need to go to the top of the line. That – I think [pause] you know, sure, there are things that would – That makes me uncomfortable and puts me in a place where we're becoming more of a mouthpiece than a watchdog. And that's not what I, what I view as the role of the press. I'm sure it could work well. I mean, every system has its pros and cons. Right now, we're owned by people who have incredibly deep pockets but don't give two fucking shits about journalism or their community.

I think having, I think there's something powerful about the nonprofit slash public media model where you are asking – it *is* a subscription, but you are pleading for, you're having more of an honest relationship with your readers or your listeners, and, you know, rather – I think I'm more comfortable with the subscription slash nonprofit model that's endowed or whatever, foundation support versus direct grants from the government.

**OK. So now, what about some of the things that I mentioned earlier, such as the postal discounts and the legal notices? So – and the tax breaks? So where the government right now does have some hand in sustaining newspapers. Do you think that something like that should continue? Do you think something like that should be expanded? I mean, where does that fit in?**

I would need to know more in terms of, like, you know, open [chuckle] – I would love to see our books, but they don't share them with us, in terms of our financials. But, like, I guess I'm ignorant enough about our benefits that we already are receiving to have a sense of whether expanding them or omitting them would be advantageous. I guess I would go back to the fact of, if you're a nonprofit, you're not paying property taxes on your property. That seems like that would be a pretty sizable benefit. And there's other, I'm sure, tax credits and write-offs that – you know, our tax code's pretty confusing. So I think regardless of the type of business that we'd be classified under, I think there are any number of ways to shave some expenses off the top or save a little money through our federal code that we have, so. I'm not, I think the status quo is perfectly fine; maybe I'm wrong.

**OK. Do you think additional government financial support would bolster or threaten your newspaper's ability to produce journalism that serves the public interest?**

It depends on the level of support, I guess. I mean, bolster or threaten? At this point, we face an existential threat. That is of – we, in terms of my organization, that's largely of our own making. So, you know, I guess [chuckle] in the position we're in, I'm not going to, I wouldn't say that federal support would do anything other than bolster it because we're in such dire straights. But ideally, if we weren't in these financial conditions that ourselves and other metro newspapers were in, you know, if we were on somewhat stable footing – I don't know; now we're talking about a [inaudible, trailing off].

I would like to see us focus on quality of journalism rather than chasing clicks and try to show which – Again, we do lots of great journalism. But we also do lots of bullshit click-bait stuff that is endemic in my field right now. I'd like to see a focus on: We are just going to create a separate portal like the San Francisco Chronicle did – sfgate.com and sfgate.com – or something like that, and charge people who are either – you can either pay for the print subscription or pay for online or get a discount if you pay for online. I'd like to see us do some sort of, you know, ask for financial support in a type of pledge drive-y model or something. But I think the corporate newspaper model is frustrating because people are really bad at marketing themselves and their work. People meaning the advertising people who are running our newspaper and others. And then people don't – I feel like good work gets lost, and nobody advocates for it. It's frustrating.

**OK. Which financial model poses a bigger threat to public-interest journalism: corporate ownership of newspapers or government support for newspapers?**

[Pause.] I guess it depends [chuckle]. I just don't – I guess I don't see a world in which government-supported newspapers exist. So it's hard to even put that in, as a possibility. But I think obviously the corporate – and it's – The corporate model worked for more than a century, and then Craigslist and Facebook and Google came along, and no one can seem to pull their heads out of their asses and figure out how to make it work online. So is that an issue of corporate – I guess I still have more faith that eventually there, you know, there will be some sort of – I'll place my bets with the, you know, the industry as is figuring it out rather than what I don't see as being any sort of likelihood, which would be a government-backed initiative. I just can't see that happening.

**You've brought that up a few times, that it seems implausible. What makes it that way? Is it a matter of perception among the public? Or is a matter of, I don't know. Would –**

It's a worthy, I think it's a worthy idea that is not likely when we have such a, I mean we have an incredibly polarized culture that is driven by, I guess, the corporate media, right? I mean, you've got the right-wing media that is incredibly influential. I mean, we can't pass a budget and haven't been able to in like 12 years in Washington. So that's where I get the ability of, like, the inability to think that there's any type of plausible world where we're looking at government-funded media. People don't trust their government. People also don't trust their media. So I guess we're in the same boat. But [chuckle] it just doesn't seem that we're in any type of place in this society where that is a possibility. But I guess it couldn't be any more damaging than where we are now.

**OK.**

I'll leave you with that happy note.

**What's that?**

Yeah, I said I'll leave you with that happy note.

[Laugh.]

I'm a blast to hang out with.

[Laugh.] **OK. And then, also, prior to this interview, how much consideration had you given to government-supported journalism? And has your opinion ever shifted?**

I think prior to this conversation, probably almost zero. Now, that might just be the culture of the newsroom where I'm at and the people I've talked or the people I associated with. You know, I don't know that I've [inaudible]. Maybe in the past I've had some sort of thoughts about like a BBC-type of model or [inaudible]. I know it's not uncommon in other countries. But I guess I hadn't really thought about it.

I think when I think of what can save metro area newspapers or news organizations, I don't turn to the government. I think of – and this is just me personally – and I know I've gotten in arguments with people on Twitter about this just in the last few days – I think of a benevolent billionaire who has local ties to the area as being a model that would work. And I guess it doesn't even have to be a billionaire. I mean, look at ProPublica. They've been around, for what, 15, 16, 17 years at this point? Has it been that long? I don't know. They seem to be doing fine and growing. And they were backed by small – millions or maybe tens of millions in support and have made it work. I think that model is replicable. I don't know why – I know that there have been attempts to try it here locally from people I know. I don't know what went wrong there. I think it's doable. I think it's, you know.

I would support government-funded if it's something that I think would, would result in moving the needle for our readers and listeners or viewers or whatever if it means it's going to be a growing, thriving enterprise. But we can't pave our streets. We can't figure out how to make affordable housing work. We can't fund our schools. We, you know, I just – and those are all local issues, but then you think of the national issues, as well. We can't agree on a budget. So I guess that's where I, like, just don't see it as being a viable option. But in a perfect world, it could work. But I'm also, you know, I just don't, I don't know. It depends on are we talking this is going to be 30 percent of your revenue is going to come from local or federal government? Or 40 percent? Or 50 percent? Or 10 percent? I guess I have a lot of questions about what that would look like.

**Right. Fear of the unknown.**

Yeah. I mean, like, you know. Everything is, everything is so – Like would that mean that you wouldn't be able to cover, let's say, Kate Brown critically because she's paying the bills? You know. Versus [inaudible] and you have a different, you have a change in party leadership. Then you'd be potentially at the whim of party interests and funding. So I think there are a lot of reasons to be dubious of it. But at the same time, what's working now is not clearly working very well.

**OK.**

If you figure it out, let us know.

**Sure, yeah. I'm sure I'll figure that out by May when I graduate. So, I'll let you know. [Laugh.]**

Deliver it to [name of newspaper's parent company] corporate headquarters out in [state]. I'm sure they'll read it.

**OK. [Chuckle.]**



## Appendix C.10: Interview 10, reporter, corporate-owned newspaper

Phone interview; February 16, 2018

**As newspapers struggle to remain profitable, various proposals have been considered to financially sustain public-interest journalism. Among these are to create new revenue opportunities within the existing for-profit ownership model, to operate newspapers as nonprofit or low-profit organizations with support from foundations and other donors, and to accept greater financial support from government agencies. How do you think public-interest journalism should be funded today?**

Yeah. I mean, I think the, one of the biggest things that we focus on in my role doing, you know, watchdog reporting on education is this extreme importance for independence. And so I can see that there's this kind of head-butting juxtaposition of, like, we have to be able to fund ourselves to be able to continue to do journalism. But then in order for us to have, to produce quality, independent journalism, we also have to remain separate from the agencies that we are covering. And, you know, we currently, in the work that I do, that gets really focused on when we talk about, for instance if we're covering even a nonprofit, and we're looking at their tax forms and seeing what revenue streams they were getting, where were they, what foundations were supporting them, do they have any political agendas, do they have any ties to political groups, how was that money used, was it used effectively, and was it used the way that they said it would be used? And holding those institutions accountable, whether they're nonprofits, government agencies, schools and districts in my situation, things like that. And so I think it would be really detrimental to the integrity of what we write if the money we are receiving to do our work is coming from the very groups that we're supposed to be holding accountable.

Now, that said, I know – kind of like what I said before – that there's difficulty in our industry to continue to get money, and every time people, you know, complain about increasing subscription costs, for example, or they're so frustrated that there's all these ads when they're reading the stories, it's difficult because I want to say, yeah, *but* we wouldn't have to do that if people were paying for more subscriptions, if they – . So it's kind of this viscous cycle of we need the money, and people will pay if they feel like they're getting quality journalism. But we don't necessarily have the money to pay for more journalists so that they have more time to cover the things that are really important and do it more in-depth. So it's kind of this constant circle of we need money to do the work that we do, but ultimately when it comes down to it, I don't know if I have a solution for this revenue stream that we should be focusing on. But I do think that if it goes against the very fabric of what our job is if we're accepting money from the groups we're supposed to be objectively critiquing.

**OK. So, I know you said that you don't necessarily have the ideal solution. But are you suggesting that we kind of need more of the same, of the for-profit ownership model, which is subscription driven. Even though subscription profits are – well, they're not as elusive as advertising profits, but – is that sort of what you're getting at, or am I misunderstanding?**

Yeah, no. I think that is what I'm getting at. I mean, I – I don't think I'm against, you know, receiving grants or additional money from an objective source, you know. I don't know how much papers currently do that, but as far as the for-profit models where you're increasing advertising and trying to get more people to subscribe, from, I mean, I am

earlier on in my career, and I've been at the same paper for three years, but from what I've seen specifically at [name of paper], what does seem to be successful is when they come up with new ways to do it and aren't just trying to push the same thing. I mean, they are ultimately, the goal is still to get more people to subscribe, for advertisers to stay loyal [inaudible] advertise with them, etc., etc.

But, you know, one example was, a [inaudible] came on a couple of years ago who started doing those stickers that they put on front of the print edition and then would give these, they would be very colorful designs, and they were, they would be putting out a lot more special deals. Now, that at the time seemed like such a, oh yeah, duh, let's just give more opportunities for there to be sales and deals, and let's make it flashier and more palatable when you see it you're like, oh, that looks nice, let's see what this is. And it was an opportunity to bring people into more, even just passing in the grocery store and saw the paper, like not just people who are receiving it at their house. And in the last year and a half – more so in the last year – I've noticed a lot nationally that the focus on subscriptions is all about when we hear a lot of the rhetoric around fake news, you see, I've been seeing a lot more publications say, you know, support quality journalism like this by subscribing. So it isn't necessarily just about you want to get the news. It was, it's kind of conveying that more to the readers, how those subscriptions *fund* [chuckle] the journalism that they want and need to read. And I think more ideas could be [inaudible]. This is obviously a very old industry [chuckle], and yet we're still coming up with new ideas on how to present it to people, and especially, you know, with the internet and the 24-hour news cycle, it seems like the papers that have been able to – I should say the companies that have been able to adjust to the change in demand and the way that we're going to present news are the ones who are able to continue. And I would think that would be the same when they are finding new and different ways to get people to pay for it.

**OK. How has your news work changed since you assumed your current job, and also over the course of your whole journalism career?**

Yeah. When I first started, which like I said, I don't have an extensive career necessarily, so [inaudible] changes. But even in the few years I have been in it professionally and full time, I started by doing far more short stories, briefs, event coverage, you know, ones that were like, oh, look at this cool thing that a few people did. And at the time, it was seen as like, oh, these are the stories that we've always written; these are the stories that are important. And the more, especially the more I was on my specific beat on education, the more we realized – and the more we tracked metrics, I should say – the more we realized which stories were and were not being read. And to what extent, because there was a really big shift in our metrics from just page views, how many people were clicking on it. And then all of sudden they were able to say how long were they reading it? Where were they viewing it from? Was it through social media? Was it on their phones vs. their computer? Were they staying on it for 10 seconds and bouncing right back out, or were they reading it for two minutes? You know, were they clicking on other stories once they've read your story? Were they, how far down were they scrolling? Did they only read the first few graphs and then they jumped out, or did they spend time reading it all? How many photos in the gallery were they clicking through? And so the more we got those metrics and the more research that's been done in my time at the [name of

newspaper], the more we've been able to see, oh, this is what we need to aim for. Now, that still has, I feel like it's fluid. It's constantly changing, right? So we had goals last year that are different than our goals last year, in our metrics.

And as far as *what* I'm covering and who I'm talking to, sources-wise, you know, my, in the last year – and I think part of this was change in leadership – but in the last year and a half or so, we shifted *far* more to be investigatory, watchdog reporting style of work to the point where I do far fewer stories but ideally they're much more in-depth. The goal is to really push the needle, to really challenge, kind of like what I said in the first question, to really hold those institutions accountable and to challenge the current way of thinking on some things. Whereas before, it was just like this is something happening in your community. Which isn't to say that that's not important, but we've definitely shifted the focus to being, OK, instead of trying to write a story a day or try to match any kind of quota, it was, OK, how can we make the stories that we *do* write far deeper, more contextual? How can we make it so that they're gonna actually result in change? You know, a lot of that [inaudible] tangible things that I started to be able to recognize in my work is, I wrote this story, it started this chain of events, and it resulted in this change of state law or of district policy. And that was something that I wasn't really doing in my first year. You know, my first year was a lot of just trying to understand what education looks like in [newspaper's coverage area], you know, what topics were important to people, what events were important to people. And now I have more of an expertise on what stories people really care about and what topics will really impact them. And so, [inaudible] shifted to, I'm really proud of how it's shifted because I feel like it's much more intentional and thoughtful, and I think it has much more potential to impact change in the community.

**OK. And how have economic factors – such as staffing levels, mergers and revenue sources – influenced the ways your work has changed?**

Yeah. I think that's a big part of it because, I mean I've been really fortunate that education is one of those beats, I mean not to say that that one hasn't changed too. The [name of newspaper] has historically had an entire education team. You know, they had editors just for education. And they had a K through 12 *and* a higher-ed reporter. And they used to have a daily education page. And that's definitely not the case anymore. I handle all of that myself, and then I go to my direct editors, an editor who oversees multiple beats. When I, the first year or two I was at [name of newspaper], there was a lot more turnover than there is now. And there's [inaudible] a lot of struggles along the way as far as journalism is notoriously a low-paying job for, especially for reporters, and there's no exception here. [Laugh.] And I'm supposed to [inaudible] try to fight for my own raises or even just professional development opportunities that cost money. I want to go to more conferences. I want to be able to take more professional development courses. Things like that that are, you know, where you have to be so savvy about how you do it. But the majority of the conferences I've been to have only been because I've been able to secure scholarships to pay for it. We just don't have the money to hire more people to expand our beats, to send people to conferences, to enter their quality work in awards competitions, you know, these things that in the past – or even just overtime, you know. Like, overtime used to be a thing where it was just like, oh, you worked 10 hours over because you got this extra story? Awesome. Great. And now it's very much, you *do* not

take overtime unless you *absolutely* have to, and you have to get it preapproved, and things like that where we just don't have that spare money to increase the same way.

That said, I do think we have – especially the young reporters who have, this has been the reality of our whole career so far. And we hear about other papers merging or companies being sold, or – you know, The Register-Guard recently being purchased and no longer being a family-owned company. We hear about layoffs all the time, and that scares us. You know, it's just kind of consistent fear that that's going to be us. And we kind of need this constant reassurance, like OK, my job's safe, [inaudible]. It's almost like every day you have to just work so hard to prove why you and your work is valuable and why you need to still be there. But going back to what I was going to say about, you know, journalists my age who they've grown up in their careers so far with that mentality, I do think we are, you know, more used to finding, having to find ways to get around that. And so even if that means – you know I've gone to the photojournalists before and I've said hey, I'd really like to be better at taking more photos. We aren't going to be able to hire a photo editor. We aren't going to hire a new photographer. We just don't have it in the budget. And if we did get it in the budget, I'd think they'd want to put that towards, perhaps, another reporter. And so the reporters are being asked to do far more video and photo than they have in years, decades past. So I want to make sure that the photos I take are – I recognize they're not going to be the same quality as this professional photographer's, but I don't want them to be notably bad, you know. So, the company can't afford to pay me to go to a photojournalism class or a training, so I've tried to find ways to take it upon myself so that I'm increasing those skills and making sure that I'm as equally relevant, or that I'm an equally relevant member of the team even if I don't have that skill set as strong.

**OK. So how have the changes that you've talked to me about, how have they helped or hindered your ability as a journalist to serve the public interest?**

[Pause.] Well, I'd say, in the micro-sense, like just as far as for me, I do think we've been able to find ways to still be able to write as much as we can, as well as we can, and for me to develop as many skills as I can so that I *can* best serve the public, so that my stories are as helpful and frequent and thorough [chuckle], you know, as they possibly can be. But I have no doubt that if I was able to do more training and if, even if there was, you know, even if I didn't have as many areas of education to cover. If we still had a higher-ed reporter versus me covering K through 12, higher ed *and* education at the Capitol, you know, I think we'd be able to get more stories covered and each person would be able to dive into those subtopics a little bit more. And I have no doubt that that would definitely serve the public more. And I think on the larger scale, that's true as well, in that if that paper was able to – *papers* – were able to hire more reporters, I mean there's reporters in journalism school still. There are plenty of reporters seeking jobs. If we could just get them *into* those jobs [chuckle], then I'm sure, you know, I mean, I would like to think that that would equal more stories and more depth in those stories because you can better delegate who's covering what subjects. I think that could really, I think that could do even more to help. But I do think we are trying our best. But there are frequently, you know, people will email me and say you wrote about *this*, but why didn't you write about *this*. And I would *love* [laugh] to be able to cover *every* single topic. You know, I wrote a story list the other day when I was going to do a one-on-one with my

editor, and it's a long list. Like, I have a lot of stories that are, you know, bills at the Capitol and short-term breaking-news stuff, and then long-term projects, and then a whole other list of potential stories that is separate from an entirely different list of general education topics I'd like to tackle. You know, and so I've been really fortunate that a lot of my stories have been able to go within a lot of these topics I think are both relevant to the public and of personal interest to me as a journalist. Like, I just have a lot of passion writing about these subjects. Some examples being, like how immigration and English language learners intersect with education. How school shootings affect students and district policy. We, I've written a lot this past year on bullying and mental health and how those connect but also how they are separate. And I think those are topics that you get that kind of public service journalism, where it's like here's information that you need to know. You know. But ideally I've been able to dive a little bit deeper and go, here's this new information, here's why it's relevant, *and* here's what the experts are thinking about it and saying what should be done, what solutions are they presenting. And it's not my role to advocate for any one solution over the other, but I do think presenting that conversation to the public can be used as a tool for them to take action in it the way that they see fit, which is one of my favorite parts of my job.

**OK. Do economic constraints in the newspaper industry have a bearing on freedom of the press?**

Hmm. I mean, I do think if we had to rely on government funding that that definitely would. You know, it's not, the press is not free and independent if they have to appease their funders and their funders are a, you know, a polarized group.

**And do you see that as what's going on now? Like, is that what's affecting economic constraints now?**

I don't think so. I think, I mean, and I could be wrong. To be fair, I don't have extensive knowledge on that. But I don't *believe* that we're receiving any funding from any groups that we have to, that we would be holding accountable at the same time. And from what I've found in my time at [name of newspaper], we did extensive ethics training and signed ethics contracts, and they've got a really strict conflict-of-interest thing. Even like graft. If a source gives us a gift, we can't, we can't keep it. They're very, I think, very, very prudent about that, or very strict about that. And I'm not aware of any revenue streams that would conflict with that. So no, I would say I don't think it's currently, at least in my experience with [name of newspaper] [inaudible] a problem.

**OK. So you're talking about sort of revenue streams. Now, what about revenue challenges? Like economic challenges that are being experienced in the industry today. Does that affect freedom of the press?**

I don't *think so*. [Chuckle.] I guess, you know, if it means that we can't cover more topics that are important for people to know, you know. The Capitol is a good example of that in that we have a politics reporter, but just one, and then we've got two or three other reporters who do, myself included, consistently cover the Capitol, but we're not there all the time, and we're not, you know, because we have other things to cover, because there aren't other reporters to cover them. So those economic constraints I think limit the stories we can write, which limits our ability to, you know, be holding those institutions or groups accountable that much more. But I don't know if I would go as far as to say it limits the *freedom* of the press.

**OK. So, I have some background on this next question. Your newspaper receives some government support: federal postal discounts, revenue from legal notices, and various tax breaks designed for publishers, for example. Does this government support have a bearing on your newspaper's press freedom or on its ability to produce public-interest journalism?**

Hmm. That is interesting. I mean, I did not know that. So I don't know if I have a thought on it *immediately*. I – from what I can *tell*, and it might be different as far as, like, within [name of newspaper's corporate parent], maybe [name of chain's largest publication]. I don't know if there's been any, just because they write nationally compared to locally. Like if they were receiving any federal breaks and funding, then I feel like they'd be the ones that maybe see it more immediately since they are the ones who are going to be covering the federal government more frequently. So I don't, yeah, that's a tough one because I haven't thought about those things. I wasn't aware of some of those things. So I don't, from what I can tell in practice, it has not been a factor. But, going back to my first answer, I see *any* involvement being [laugh] potentially bad. So I don't know. I don't know.

**All right. So, do you consider journalism to be a public good? And what I mean by that is something society needs but that the private sector cannot provide on its own. So according to this definition, examples of public goods include education, medical research and infrastructure.**

Can you say the first part of that again? That the public needs but that the private sector cannot supply? Is that what you said?

**On its own. So something society needs but that the private sector cannot provide on its own.**

Hmm. [Pause.] I do think it's something that the public needs. I do think that we serve a critical public service. [Pause.] I'm thinking through this just because I don't know how, as far as the caveat that the private sector can't provide it on its own, in the context of funding, that is hairy. [Laugh.] [Pause.] So I don't know. I mean – [pause]. If there's, you know, any reason to think that it can't be provided consistently, because I mean I do think that there's different types of journalism, like there's – some is, not all journalism is created equally, I guess, in that sense [chuckle]. And I know that, like, when I was writing articles for my university when I was doing it as a work study as a student, my job was to write journalistic articles, but it was for a marketing department. I was paid for, my position was paid by the university, and my goal of the articles was not to highlight these bad and good things happening at the university. It was really just to make the university look good. So it's just like, that's not, you know, that's helpful to the university and maybe helpful to the people who are looking for the good things in the university, but is it a public service necessarily? No, it's not that type of journalism. But I do think that the more traditionally thought of newspaper journalism that we do should be objective and should be something to be providing knowledge and information to the community that they should need. That's what journalism should, you know, is intended to be. But as far as it not being able to operate in the private sector on its own, I don't know how I'd answer that just because of it being tied with, OK, so then does it require funding?

**OK. So, I'm going to give you some background then on this next question. It's typical for newspapers worldwide to receive some form of government support. Most free-press countries offer newspapers benefits such as tax breaks and ad revenue, although these incentives are lowest in the United States. Many governments also offer newspapers grants to expand circulation or to support**

**journalism quality. What kind of government financial support, if any, do you think your newspaper should receive?**

Hmm. [Pause.] Well, I mean, the, you know, the watchdog journalist in me wants to say none. But I also know that I feel, I feel [laugh] that I just don't know enough about the context of it. I mean, that's really useful, helpful background information. I just don't know how much of it I'm aware of, you know. And so, I guess I would want to know what the reasoning and thinking behind it has been to get any kind of tax breaks or expansions and how others feel about it conflicting or not conflicting with freedom of the press. So I'm not sure about that one.

**OK. So in this next question, you started to answer already. But I'm going to ask it anyway in case you have something else to add. Would additional government financial support bolster or threaten your newspaper's ability to produce journalism that serves the public interest?**

Well, I mean, yeah, I think in general, I think they should be as separate as possible. So any additional funding, unless there was, you know, like there being any reason for there being any existing funding, unless there was a very important and easily explained reason as to why they're increasing funding, I would say, you know, it would *hurt*. I would want to keep them as separate as possible.

**And then which financial model poses a bigger threat to public-interest journalism: corporate ownership of newspapers or government support for newspapers?**

Not to say that corporate-owned papers don't have their own flaws, but I would think as far as to the public interest, I would think government. Not because [chuckle] I have anything against the government, but like I said before, just that if our role is to hold those types of institutions accountable, that the more involvement they have, the harder it is for us to do that.

**OK. And then finally, prior to this interview, how much consideration had you given to government-supported journalism? And has your opinion ever shifted?**

I mean, I've given it some. We have the First Amendment up on our wall in the newsroom. And we've talked a lot about, you know, conflicts of interest in other capacities, you know. If we wanted to donate money at Christmas or for someone's birthday, what organizations can we give to? And during political campaigns, or elections, excuse me, what information are we allowed to share, even on our own personal social media? Things like that where we had a lot of conversation on kind of the role that journalism versus the government plays and kind of how and why we're separate, etc., etc. I feel like I've given that a lot of thought.

As far as government funding, even just within this conversation, those two pieces of background that you gave me are things that I have not heard or known before. And so I do think that I'd like to give more thought to what's currently in place. And that may very possibly change my opinion on it. But I don't think it will change my overall view that they should be as separate as possible. It just might alter my understanding or support of the current involvement or any additional ones if they're able to show why and how we can remain as independent as possible.

## Appendix C.11: Interview 11, reporter, family-owned newspaper

Skype interview; February 2, 2018

**So the first question I have for you, I've got a little bit of background. So, as newspapers struggle to remain profitable, various proposals have been considered to financially sustain public-interest journalism. Among these are to create new revenue opportunities within the existing for-profit ownership model, to operate newspapers as nonprofit or low-profit organizations with support from foundations and other donors, and to accept greater financial support from government agencies. How do you think public-interest journalism should be funded today?**

It's a hard question to answer, because I see the value of those options that you laid out. But each of them have potential pitfalls in that if it's government agency or nonprofit or low-profit, there still might be pressures, and pressures may be amplified to try to spin news one way or another. You know, right off the top of my head, I can't think of an ideal model. But I do think having somehow a connection of the people who are consuming the product to the people producing it, that's a way to both fund the journalism and ensure that there's value in it. And I can expand on that later on. But that's just kind of off the top of my head.

**Oh, OK. So, would you say – and not to put words in your mouth, so I apologize if that – but just along those lines, one example I could think of where there is, or a couple of examples where a consumer has more of a relationship with the news product would be by helping fund it through either a paywall type of model or through maybe a public broadcasting sort of model, like a fund drive sort of thing. Are either of those along the lines of what you're talking about?**

Yeah. I think the public broadcasting model would be in line with what I'm thinking about. I was just talking with a friend the other day about this, and we were talking about newspaper subscribers and how moving those people to being members can be a way, you know – not just semantics, but getting people to have this different feeling of, if I'm giving money, it's not just, oh, I'm buying this thing, but I am supporting and being a part of this community in some way. And I think public media really benefits from people who they'll support it no matter what, even if they don't consume it. And being in a newspaper right now, we're bound by our subscribers really are our consumers. You know, the elephant in the room has been trying to get those people to pay for what they consume. And that's at the root of all of these problems that so many companies are having right now.

**OK. So, how has your news work changed since you assumed your current job, as well as over the course of your journalism career?**

[Pause.] I – it's interesting. So, I've been in my current place for about two years. And so my job here hasn't really changed a whole lot. My, what I cover has changed. But that's really kind of aside from what you're asking. We do very much have a Web-first ethos in the newsroom where we are posting stories before they go to print and we're really just making sure we get news out as soon as we have it. And that's a pretty big change from when I started. My first year as a staff writer was in 2003 at a small newspaper. And, you know, we had an online presence, but it was very much things went in the paper and eventually got put up online. I remember this one time when we did a weekend Web update, and it just seemed [chuckle] like, you know, this crazy new horizon of like, oh,



whoa, we can put out news without having it printed yet. And so that's a really big change. I've also throughout my career had video and other forms of reporting be a part of what I do. Currently that's a small portion. But for a while, I was producing video almost as much as I was writing stories. But it seems like that push has kind of subsided.

**So is that, is that your news organization has put less value on video, or they've redistributed who's doing that?**

The past two places I've been, we've actually had a videographer. And so there's more – I think for a while, there was an idea let's get every reporter out there trying to do video. And then they kind of hit reset and said [inaudible] let's get someone who's really skilled in that regard. And I actually learned today, though, that the last paper I worked at doesn't have the videographer anymore [chuckle]. So, you know, signs of the times. And I think, I don't know, with video, it's so much about what you're able to capture. From my own experiences in it, if you can really, you know, get to the fire when things are exploding, like blowing up, you know, something really dramatic, that will draw people to watch it. And if you don't have super compelling content, it's hard to get people to click. And so I think that's why a lot of news organizations, they still want to have video, but it's figuring out how to get good compelling stuff in the news flow.

**OK. Do you think that drive for getting something compelling, has that had an impact at all on how you do your job?**

No. So much about what I do, you know, I think it's funny as things have changed from when I started to now, it almost seems like things have come back around to where I began, where it's so much about, you know, breaking news for lack of a better term. Like if you can really get that item of information that other people don't have yet, that is the main goal. And early on in my career, even in some small markets, I was really competing with some TV stations. It just really got me into like, OK, well how do you tell a different story, find different angles, really find that information that people will then see you as the source to trust. I think all this move to digital and tweeting and all this, it comes back around to having that, you know, that information and breaking news.

**OK. And do you think, you know, you mentioned competition a little bit, and I think that's interesting. Has that had an influence then on, like do you find – now, I guess you haven't been where you are now for too long, so you said there haven't been a lot of changes. But do you find that the market has less competition where you are now and that affects the immediacy of your work? Or?**

I actually – So the last two places I've worked were definitely competitive but were not as concerned about the competitors. Previously, [inaudible] back to my job a couple of stages ago, I was in Northern California, and there were, particularly when it came to breaking online news, we were on a very tight competition with the TV station because it was, you know, late or mid- to late 2000s, and it was really when websites were taking hold, and so there was kind of an ongoing attempt to be the primary breaking news website. And so in contrast to that period, I just haven't felt that much competition in a while. Actually, early on in my career, even though I was at a small newspaper, it was a place with interest from the state's largest newspaper, and so I had a competition with them. But as things have changed and I'm more focused on the metro area, occasionally – To answer your question succinctly, I just don't feel as much competition now.

**OK. How have economic factors – such as staffing levels, mergers, revenue sources – influenced the way your work has changed?**

I think the way they end up changing things, because I've been through downsizings in newsrooms, and it just becomes a work volume situation. As newsrooms shrink, there's still a lot of work to be done. And depending on what your role is, you likely, if you survived a layoff, you're going to have more things to do. I think back to when I was in a newsroom that we, it wasn't a layoff, but we had a crime reporter leave, and rather than replace the reporter, we actually just spread the responsibility around. And so a week at a time, you'd have to come in early, check crime situations from the night before, write crime stories, and so about one every six weeks, I'd be doing two jobs. And so that obviously impacted what I was doing primarily because I had another job to do. So that's the way that economics end up affecting the news, is just that as you play the musical chairs, there's still a lot to do, and you have less time to do it. If that makes sense. [Laugh.]

**Absolutely. And so, I'm going to ask you to speculate a little here, and if you don't feel comfortable with that, that's fine. But I'm curious, obviously you don't know what the situation's going to be like months down the road, but I'm curious if you anticipate economic impact [cough] – excuse me – affecting how you do your job. [Cough.]**

Yeah. Gosh, I wish I could offer you some water. [Laugh.] Yeah, I mean I think it's unfortunately just become a, you know, just a given with this industry despite overall economic improvements, you know, things going better as a whole for the national economy, newspapers in particular are still having a hard time. Really because of the digital situation. It's the continuing move to digital and just how to finance that. So I definitely see as we continue, you know, I think you'd be hard-pressed to find a newspaper that says things are going to change anytime soon. [Chuckle.] And so, just definitely braced for it and hoping I can stay in the field as long as I can. And [inaudible] that changes.

**OK. How do you think these changes to your work have helped or hindered your ability as a journalist to serve the public interest?**

Well, when I was talking about the workload, it can actually sometimes be a good thing. Throughout it all, I have become very good at quickly synthesizing, you know, taking information and putting together stories. Probably some of my best skills as a reporter are breaking news. I feel like that's [inaudible].

**OK. Do you feel like there are any other impacts to the public interest as far as the types of changes you've experienced over the years?**

Well, I think as newsrooms get smaller, there's less things that get covered. In all the places I've worked, there's small communities that have city councils, that have very – issues going on very specific to them, and we're able to cover those less and less. I think it's those really small communities that can be hurt the most by all these changes because it kind of really depends if they happen to have some sort of news source there. Because even in the smallest towns, things can get pretty political. And I think, you know, there was a time where we would be sending people to these small outlying communities, and yeah, that's definitely one of the things that is getting affected.

**OK. Do economic constraints in the newspaper industry have a bearing on freedom of the press?**

I'm sorry. What's that again?

**Do economic constraints in the newspaper industry have any bearing on freedom of the press?**

I feel like they could, especially as you just see, you know, just like many things, you have fewer and fewer organizations in the role of ownership, you're going to have less and less voices. Particularly you look at major cities around the country, and I can't think of one nowadays, except in New York maybe, that has multiple newspapers. And, granted, Portland has The Oregonian and the Tribune, but in the heyday where you really had two strong, distinct voices at least and multiple voices out there, I feel like as things just get so consolidated, you're starting to get just, you know, less and less voices, less and less opinions out there. And so I definitely see a connection between those.

**OK. With this question, I have a little bit of background. Your newspaper receives some government support: federal postal discounts, revenue from legal notices, and various tax breaks designed for publishers, for example. Does this government support have a bearing on your newspaper's press freedom or on its ability to produce public-interest journalism?**

I don't think it plays a part. Like at the places I've been, that hasn't been an issue. I've been very thankful. I feel like a lot of people outside of journalism wonder, oh, what are your bosses telling you to do? Or trying to get you to cover stories in one way or another? And I've been very thankful that I've never had things like those that you just outlined or other forces influence how I can do my job.

**OK. Do you consider journalism to be a public good? And what I mean by that is something society needs but that the private sector cannot provide on its own. So according to this definition, examples of public goods include education, medical research and infrastructure.**

Hmm. It's interesting, when you first said that, I was ready to say absolutely. But hearing more specifically the definition of public good, I don't know if on the same realm as education. And I feel like it is something that the private sector might be able to supply. But I just don't know how you address the challenges of funding it like you used to. You know, the advertising model that was created just for so long did work so well and doesn't anymore. What makes me hesitant to say, oh, it definitely, it should be like education or it should be like this or that, things actually get so political when it is then government money, or I think of school systems and just how political and how involved boards can be. As ironic as it might seem, but when you have media companies privately financed, you actually *can* have some of the greatest freedom as a journalist.

As I've mentioned, I've held four separate jobs, and I've worked as an intern in a number of newsrooms before that, and all of them have private models and didn't, you know, just basically asked me to go be a journalist and didn't ask me to try to tell news from one perspective or another. And I just get really concerned about if it's that public good model, then all of a sudden it's, oh, well if, you know, the greatest role in how newspapers and media are so important is that they can be a watchdog, and it's really hard to be a watchdog if the one financing you can also then be one of those agencies or things that need to be watched.

**OK. You know, I want to try to ask that same question sort of in a different way, too. I want to ask you, suppose that if the private sector, if it turned out it was unable to sustain journalism, do you think the government would have an obligation to step in and make sure that it continues?**

Unfortunately, I don't. [Chuckle.] I mean, I'm thinking of some countries like China and North Korea, and you hear about state-run media, and I just, I don't know. I just don't know if there is actually an obligation. You have so many existing agencies that they might have an obligation to somehow create news. You know, like the Forest Service put

out information about what they're planning to do. Department of Revenue and things like that. There might be obligations on these various departments. But whether the government should be so inclined to set up its actual own network and things like that, I just don't think that's actually the case. Because you'd need the feds and state and local. And there's already an existing infrastructure [inaudible] spokespeople and things like that. Nowadays a lot of those people are former media people themselves. So, hopefully they'll get the concepts and tenets of what we're trying to do. Yeah. [Laugh.] Just hope for the best.

**OK. And so I'm going to give you a little bit of background for this next question, too. It's typical for newspapers worldwide to receive some sort of government support. Most free-press countries offer newspapers benefits such as tax breaks and ad revenue, although these incentives are lowest in the United States. Many governments also offer newspapers grants to expand circulation or to support journalism quality. What kind of government financial support, if any, do you think your newspaper should receive?**

[Inaudible] kind of connecting to that last question you had, I think that would be a much better way to try to support journalism rather than, you know, create a new bureaucratic entity that might be cumbersome and have its own economic problems. Just provide economic incentives for private industry via tax breaks or grants or funds. I feel like things along the lines of [inaudible] other ways to help companies cover [inaudible] costs would be better than actually just direct grants and funding. Again, my concern about some levels, like if there's a grant, there may then be inclination to do some things, but I feel like tax breaks would be a great way to support that.

**OK. So would you say that, would additional government financial support bolster or threaten your newspaper's ability to produce journalism that serves the public interest?**

I feel like it would bolster it. You know, I would hope that it would come with no strings attached, you know. But any type of support now would definitely help.

**OK. Prior to this interview, how much consideration had you given to government-supported journalism? And has your opinion ever shifted?**

Well, actually, you know, having been in the business for a while, many of my friends have gone and worked for government organizations, and particularly at the universities. And I have a friend who's at a federal agency in D.C. And many of them are able to do some pretty good storytelling. Because that's at the end of the day what journalism is, is storytelling. And I've seen some of them get to do some pretty interesting stories.

**OK. And which financial model poses a bigger threat to public-interest journalism: corporate ownership of newspapers or government support for newspapers?**

[Pause.] I feel like, given how partisan politics are becoming, that government support could actually be worse at the moment. Just because it seems like it could come from one side or another. And again, I keep adding this what-if and if there's strings attached or something, which I don't know; I might be taking that a step too far. But just given the political nature of governmental support at the moment, that would give me a little more cause for concern.

## **Appendix C.12: Interview 12, reporter, family-owned newspaper**

Phone interview; January 17, 2018

**With the first question I want to ask you, I'm going to give you just kind of a little bit of background first. And then I'll ask the question. As newspapers struggle to remain profitable, various proposals have been considered to financially sustain public-interest journalism. Among these are to create new revenue opportunities within the existing for-profit ownership model, to operate newspapers as nonprofit or low-profit organizations with support from foundations or other donors, and to accept greater financial support from government agencies. How do you think public-interest journalism should be funded today?**

I think the, of those options, the nonprofit model sounds the most promising. I think that the idea of government funding does bring with it this kind of a, kind of a can of worms, in that if you are receiving your funding from the government, it might have a bit of a chilling effect on the investigative reporting that you have to do into the government agencies that are funding you. And I think we've all seen that corporations' funding news isn't going that well so far.

**OK. And now, just to get a little more specific about your job. How has your news work changed since you assumed your current job, as well as over the course of your journalism career?**

I think, so I've only been out of college and working full time in the field for two years now, so it hasn't changed that dramatically in that short a period of time, just doing kind of similar reporting at different newspapers.

**OK. And then, so the demands of the reporting then are, have been pretty standard from one gig to another?**

Yeah.

**OK. And then, how have economic factors – for example: staffing levels, mergers and revenue sources – influenced the ways your work has changed? Now, you mentioned that it hasn't changed much. But maybe you can tell me how it's influenced your work a little bit.**

So, the first job I had out of college was at a newspaper in [a Midwest state] that was bought by GateHouse, one of the hedge fund companies that buys up a lot of local papers. And I left that job for a gig at the AP about a couple months after GateHouse bought it and of course still stayed in close contact with a lot of co-workers that I had there. And while I was able to get out in time, I saw the way that being bought by this other company affected the people who are still there and the people who've left. So that newsroom is now half the size that it was when I started there two years ago, and that was a change over the course of the years.

And here in [name of city], we see, because of how the economy has affected our local newspaper business, we have positions that we can't afford to fill, or sometimes we'll get emails from our publisher the day before payday, saying we don't have the funds to fund payroll on time that month, and various things like that.

**I've just noticed – and maybe you can't speak to this or not – but I've noticed that [name of current paper] seems to have more job openings posted than many newspapers in the state. So it's not a complete freeze, right? But you're seeing this occasionally? Or –**

Right. So, that actually, we do have a lot higher turnover than a lot of papers, it seems like. And the fact that you're sometimes paid late, that, until this year, I think from the recession until the third of this year, reporters had to take two mandatory unpaid days off a month, and that they don't offer health insurance means that you get a lot of especially younger people who can still be on their parents' health insurance who will come and work for a year, and then [inaudible].

**Oh, OK. Interesting.**

But I do believe it's one of the larger newsrooms in the state, just because The Oregonian and the Statesman Journal and some of the others have cut back further.

**Yeah, it's remarkable when you look at the difference between the Statesman Journal, the size, and [name of newspaper]. It's pretty different. OK. Well, that's interesting. So, let's see, next: How have these changes that you mentioned – like you mentioned the GateHouse acquisition and, granted, that didn't affect you a whole lot, but then you mentioned some of these economic factors that you're seeing in your current job – now, how has this helped or hindered your ability as a journalist to serve the public interest?**

I think it definitely has an impact. So, when we'll get these emails about not being paid on time, like I am not doing a good job reporting the few hours after getting that because I'm stressed about like how am I going to, do I have bills that are going to come out the next day, and am I going to make this work? And there's just kind of the financial stresses that really do impact the time and energy that you can fully dedicate to doing your job, and then working in when newsrooms get smaller, there's a bit more stresses that you have to take on. Extra duties that previously another reporter would have done.

**OK. So then, do you think economic constraints, like you've discussed, in the newspaper industry have a bearing on freedom of the press?**

I feel like they don't directly affect the freedom of the press, but they do make it harder to have a free and independent watchdog press because, just because there isn't, like the more economic constraints you have, the less money and resources you have to dedicate to journalism, the less, or like the worse journalism you're going to have.

**OK. This next question is going to start with just another, a little bit of background. So, your paper receives some government support. [Audible beep.] Can you still hear me?**

Yes.

**OK. Hold on just one moment. Let me check my recorder. [Pause.] OK, so your newspaper receives some government support: federal postal discounts, revenue from legal notices, and various tax breaks designed for publishers, for example. Does this government support have a bearing on your newspaper's press freedom or on its ability to produce public-interest journalism?**

I don't think so. I honestly did not, had not even made the connection between legal notices, which I know are paid and in newspapers, and the idea that that would be government support. And I don't think that's really something that's understood in most newsrooms? And I guess like that might be something that publishers might think about, but I don't think most reporters and editors do.

**So, if you're not thinking about it on a reporting level – so it's obviously not influencing your work directly – do you think that it's influencing your work indirectly at all or influencing the resources available to you or anything along those lines that might have an impact on public-interest journalism or freedom of the press?**

I don't think so. Like, I don't think there's any fear, like even coming from the publisher, that if he wrote something negative about the city [name of city], they're not suddenly going to suddenly stop publishing their legal notices here because that's something they have to do. So it feels like there's a – it's definitely a sense of, that is a money stream, but it does not affect journalism.

**Next, do you consider journalism to be a public good, meaning something society needs but that the private sector cannot provide on its own? Per this definition, examples of public goods include education, medical research and infrastructure.**

Yes, absolutely. And I think you can see that in places like NPR and PBS that *definitely* provide a public good but are also publicly funded.

**OK. Now, I want to go back to something you said a little bit ago, in the first question. Now, you're citing NPR and PBS. I know in the beginning you said that the government funding, which goes to, public broadcasters do receive some government funding, of course, and you mentioned that that could open a can of worms. And I'm just curious about your opinion on whether you think that can of worms has been opened for them, or if you think that, you know, do you think that they're compromised in any way?**

I don't believe so. I think they're both, they've both been around for a long time. They're large enough and have these structures in place to the point where, when there's that threat of removing funding from NPR and PBS earlier this year, they were able to report on it in a very, very clear, transparent way and continue that.

Where I think there's a bit of a risk, I guess would be something kind of like college newspapers, which often end up receiving some sort of support from the university, and then that comes through and that it is something where the university administration or the student government will threaten to take away that funding if they don't agree with what's published.

**OK. Good example. And then, I'm going to give you another little bit of background here before I ask the next question. So, it's typical for newspapers worldwide to receive some form of government support. Most free-press countries offer newspapers benefits such as tax breaks and ad revenue, although these incentives are lowest in the United States. Many governments also offer newspapers grants to expand circulation or to support journalism quality. What kind of government financial support, if any, do you think your newspaper should receive?**

That's a tough question. I don't know other than what it has at the moment. I don't know what government support I'd be comfortable with it receiving. [Pause.] I think maybe a grant that is, like grants that the newsroom itself has control over would, how to spend and best use that money, could be useful.

**OK. So, would additional government financial support bolster or threaten your newspaper's ability to produce journalism that serves the public interest?**

I think that depends on what ties might come with it. So, if it's just the government deciding that news is a public good and should be supported and just saying here is this amount of money, do with it what you will, make good journalism, that would be positive, and it *would* bolster the newspaper's mission. But if there were any sort of ties attached to it, it could hurt it.

**OK. And can you elaborate a little bit on what ties you're referring to?**

So I think any idea that we gave you this money, so we want you to report in this way, whether it's spelled out or just implied, would hurt.

**OK. So, which financial model poses a bigger threat to public-interest journalism: corporate ownership of newspapers or government support for newspapers? And why?**

I think it's definitely corporate ownership. And particularly these hedge funds that have been buying up a lot of newspapers.

**OK. And why would you say that they pose a bigger threat?**

Because they're, instead of – and hedge funds specifically are designed to bring profit for their shareholders; they're not designed – they have no interest in furthering the actual interest, business of journalism. So that's how you see groups that will buy a paper and bleed them dry and leave towns without a [inaudible] source of news that they once relied on.

**So now, it's interesting because your career, you've seen this with the ownership of GateHouse. And then now you're working for a family-owned company, which is substantially different in the types of shareholders, I guess. On the other hand – I'm curious if you could speak to that a little bit, on how, you know, that threat to the public interest based on the funding model, how do you feel like it's different or the same between that hedge fund ownership and the family ownership?**

The paper in [name of Midwest state] was family owned before it was bought, as well. And my experience with smaller, family-owned papers is that, well right now we're [inaudible] on the third or fourth generation of family members who own it, and they're not incredibly invested in the paper, so it is more, you have just kind of non-interested owners far away who just let the paper do as it wishes, which is nice. And you don't have any of the things that you might see come up with papers owned by places like GateHouse or Gannett or Advance. So we don't face the pressure that they, I understand The Oregonian has to, reporters have a certain number, like quota of stories they have to do. Or a friend who's a photographer at the Statesman Journal has to take a lot more videos and slideshows because that's going to produce more of a profit for their owners, whereas ours aren't really invested in that.

**OK. The last thing I want to ask you is, prior to this interview, how much consideration had you given to government-supported journalism? And has your opinion ever shifted?**

I mean, I read like Poynter and the Columbia Journalism Review regularly, so I'll read about various models for funding journalism. I think I've been kind of intrigued but also worried about the idea of exactly what truly government-funded journalism would look like.

**Have you seen, like, in the things you've read about it, have you seen different possibilities thrown out there for what it might look like, or has it been sort of vague like oh, the government should step in and support this, but there's really no good explanation of what that means?**

I think probably the most clear explan– like, comparison I would see would be to something like the BBC in the U.K. or NPR and PBS here if they were funded at a higher level.

**OK. I do have one follow-up question here, because I meant to ask you about this: With The Associated Press, the model, the ownership model is kind of unusual. I mean, technically it is a nonprofit. And I think you mentioned earlier that, in the beginning, you thought that of the possibilities for funding models that I mentioned, that nonprofits seemed to be the most promising. And I'm curious what, how that relates to your experience working at The Associated Press. Is that the kind of model that looks promising, or something needs to be different?**



Because the AP is funded entirely or almost entirely by member paper dues, it's not necessarily what I'd consider like a true nonprofit. But I guess it is technically that. I guess what I would think of like a nonprofit funding news, I think of something, one of these foundations that will step in, and I think they're often behind kind of investigating reporting outfits that aren't dailies but do produce real great stories. But I can see AP [inaudible] run very well and provides a really, really important service for a lot of papers that have had to cut back on their coverage, of statehouses especially.

**And then regarding the funding of it, like the foundations, which do provide a lot of support for nonprofits, and then individual donors as well. Do you feel like, you know, you had mentioned government and whether there would be strings attached to that money. You mentioned corporations and how their interests are with their shareholders. Do you feel like nonprofits, if there is that same issue with ties to foundations? Are they beholden to foundations in the same way?**

I think there definitely can be, so I guess that's something where you just need the benevolent foundation that supports press freedom even if the result of that reporting is something the people behind the foundation might not agree with.