

To: Members of the Senate Committee on Commerce and General Government

Re: Support for Measure SB1580

Dear Committee and Legislature Members:

My wife and I have owned and operated The New Era newspaper in Sweet Home, and now also in Lebanon, for most of the past 20 years as an independent, family-owned local news operation.

I would have preferred to give you oral testimony in person, but Wednesday is a very busy day for most community newspapers like ours. And this week we have a staff member out, so I will be the designated driver to pick up our current edition of The New Era from the printer and I have to do it while you are holding your hearing. So I need to offer my thoughts in writing.

I urge you to support SB 1580, but I also urge you to think through the arguments and settle on an equitable solution that will truly put money in local newsrooms that desperately need it.

I have worked in print journalism almost non-stop since 1980 – when I started as an 18-year-old cub sports reporter at the Grants Pass Daily Courier, (incidentally, another family-owned operation). In 45 years I have seen a lot of changes in our industry, most of them debilitating to local newspapers. Some formerly robust newspapers I have had the privilege to work for, once thriving and well-respected in their communities, no longer exist.

You are, I'm sure, aware of some of the reasons why newspapers have sustained the proverbial "thousand cuts" that, as I stated recently to readers in an editorial about the state of our newspaper, have made print journalism difficult on every level, not just the reporting side. Appropriation by online and social media giants of the news, which I pay my staff to produce, is just one of many battles we fight every day.

I would hope we agree that local news, reported accurately and with integrity, increases local government accountability and transparency, increases civic engagement and identity, combats the misinformation that's rife in social media, documents important history and provides many other benefits that would take too much space to detail here. Without a solid local news organ, communities falter.

No law is going to entirely solve problems instigated by greed and other motives. (We see screenshots of our paywall-accessed stories posted online by people who want to take advantage of us, but not support our efforts.) But I believe this bill will move us toward needed negotiation with the goal of establishing a fair mechanism for the transfer of news content. I support the bill if, indeed, 90 percent of compensation does go to journalism organizations like ours, supporting real efforts to produce news content. I hear the concerns voiced by those in opposition and I agree that the measure needs to be constructed to achieve that end.

We have lost significant advertising dollars in recent decades to online media as local businesses are wooed by them, and now we have local news content appropriated by AI and other scraping mechanisms, providing browsers with information we're paying money to produce. Some say that restricting Big Tech's free access to our content will reduce our readership, but, at least at the local level, people know where to go to find our news and they should fairly compensate us for producing it.

Every dollar lost by the local newspaper is one more strike against the production of local news. That's the bottom line.

I know you will be listening to all sides on this issue and I hope you can find a solution that will bring the parties to the table in a manner that will sustain, rather than further deplete, our efforts to tell our communities what is happening around them. This bill can right wrongs and it should.

Thank you.

Scott Swanson

Sweet Home/Lebanon