

Submitter: Phil Wright
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Commerce and General Government
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1580

I'm writing to urge you to support Senate Bill 1580.

I'm Phil Wright, East Oregonian regional editor and publisher. I oversee a news team of eight staff — just five are full-time news reporters — covering Morrow, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, Baker and Grant counties. That's more than 18,000 square miles, an area larger than some states. But we provide local residents with critical news coverage, from watchdog reporting to coverage of cultural and community events.

I was 9 in 1977 when "Star Wars" hit movie screens, and that message of a plucky group of rebels taking on the inhumane Galactic Empire left its mark on me. Today, it can feel like I'm part of a small alliance fighting against tech giants that might not be inhumane but do rely on our efforts to fill their coffers without paying fair recompense. This presents a serious threat to our ability to cover news in our communities.

SB 1580 rectifies that. It would require big tech using our reporting to drive their own advertising revenue to pay a stipend per journalist across newsrooms in Oregon. The legislation requires 90% of the proceeds go to journalists and staff serving more than 35 Oregon communities.

For Eastern Oregon, where most of our newsrooms have just one reporter, passage of the bill would help us avoid layoffs and thus avoid creating news deserts. It would help us retain reporters who have been in our communities for years and could lead us to hire new reporters and dedicate resources to more investigative and watchdog work.

Without trusted, accountable local journalism, fake news thrives, rumors supplant facts, civic engagement plummets and all of us lose.

I think local newsrooms to some degree always will feel like they are the rebels. And SB 1580 can be the lightsaber Oregon needs for a strong and independent fourth estate.

Thank you for your consideration and for your support of the vital role trusted local news can play in creating a stronger Oregon.

Respectfully,

Phil Wright
East Oregonian regional editor and publisher