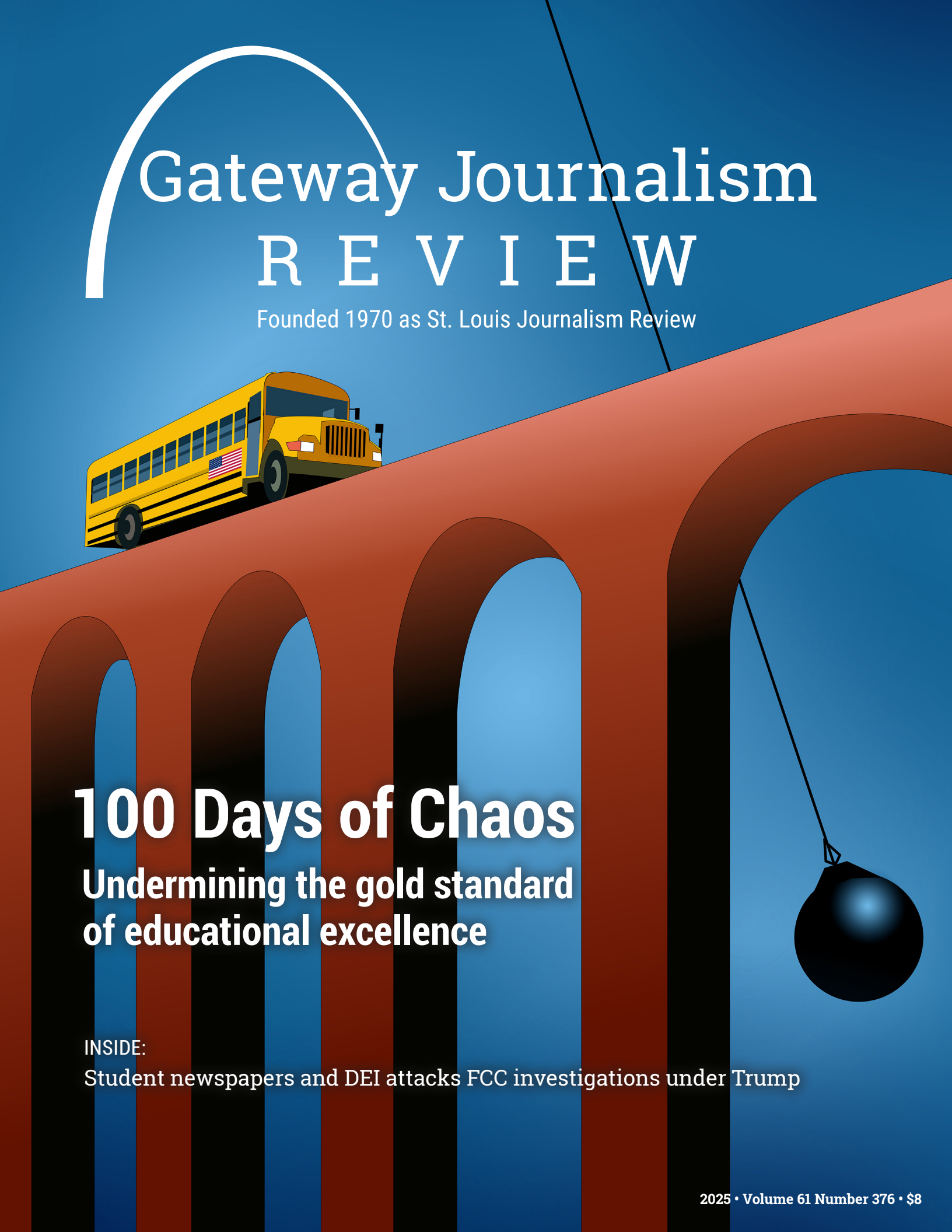
Gateway Journalism
REVIEW
Founded 1970 as St. Louis Journalism Review



100 Days of Chaos

Undermining the gold standard of educational excellence

INSIDE:
Student newspapers and DEI attacks FCC investigations under Trump

2025 • Volume 61 Number 376 • $8

CONTRIBUTORS

GJR FOUNDER

CHARLES KLOTZER is the founder of the St. Louis Journalism Review.

PUBLISHER

WILLIAM H. FREIVOGEL is a former editorial page deputy editor for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and contributes to St. Louis Public Radio. He is a member of the Missouri Bar.

EDITOR

JACKIE SPINNER is a professor at Columbia College in Chicago and journalist specializing on the Middle East; former Baghdad Bureau Chief at the Washington Post.

MANAGING EDITOR

ELIZABETH THARAKAN is a fourth-year PhD candidate in the Mass Communication and Media Arts program at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

PUBLICATION DESIGNER

KATIE GRIFFITH is a graphic designer at SIU Printing & Duplicating.

COPY EDITOR

RUTH JOHNSON is a Chicago-based freelance multimedia journalist.

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

WILLIAM SCHWARTZ is the newsletter editor for Gateway Journalism Review. His writing has appeared in HanCinema, Book and Film Globe, and The Comics Journal among other publications and deals heavily with the mainstream reception and historical perspective of particular popular culture genres. He's currently studying in the Mass Communication and Media Arts graduate program at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

CONTRIBUTORS

ROBERT KOENIG is a former Washington correspondent for the Post-Dispatch.

MARY ELLEN NOONAN KOENIG is a retired U.S. diplomat with expertise in public diplomacy, having served overseas and in Washington, D.C.

KATIE KWASNESKI is a student at Southern Illinois University Carbondale and a staff reporter for the Daily Egyptian.

ALLIE MILLER is a Pittsburgh-based freelance journalist.

TED GEST covered federal and state courts in St. Louis for the Post-Dispatch between 1972 and 1977. He later covered legal affairs, including the U.S. Supreme Court and other courts nationwide, for U.S. News and World Report magazine between 1981 and 1996. He now edits a daily news digest, Crime and Justice News.

MARK GUYER is the former deputy director of the National Human Genome Research Institute at NIH before his retirement. He worked at NIH for 28 years.

DON CORRIGAN is the former editor of the Webster-Kirkwood Times and emeritus professor at Webster University.

MOLLY PARKER is a professor of journalism in Southern Illinois University Carbondale's College of Arts and Media.

JULIA RENDLEMAN is an assistant professor of photojournalism at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

ANYA GUYER is a Global Public Health Consultant in Boston, MA

SCOTT LAMBERT is an associate journalism/English professor at Millikin University and former student editor of GJR.

TERRY GANEY is a former St. Louis Post-Dispatch investigative reporter and former St. Louis editor for Gateway Journalism Review.

MARGARET WOLF FREIVOGEL is former editor of St. Louis Public Radio and the St. Louis Beacon and was a reporter and editor at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch for 34 years. She was a close friend and colleague of Robert Duffy.

OLIVIA COHEN is a Midwest-based journalist and a frequent contributor to GJR.

PUBLISHED BY:

School of Journalism and Advertising
College of Arts and Media
Hong Cheng, Dean
Jan Thompson, Director

The Gateway Journalism Review GJR (USPS 738-450 ISSN: 0036-2972) is published quarterly, by Southern Illinois University Carbondale, School of Journalism, College of Mass Communication and Media Arts, a non-profit entity. The office of publication is SIUC School of Journalism, 1100 Lincoln Drive, Mail Code 6601, Carbondale, IL 62901.

TO SUBSCRIBE:

618-536-3361
gatewayjr.org/about
Sign up for our weekly newsletter at gatewayjr.org.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

$25 — one year
$35 — two years
$45 — three years

Foreign subscriptions higher depending upon country.

POSTMASTER:

Please send address changes to:
Gateway Journalism Review
Amber Easton
School of Journalism
1100 Lincoln Drive
Mail Code 6601
Carbondale, IL 62901

Periodical postage paid at Carbondale, IL, and additional mailing offices.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

4 Opinion: Publisher's Column: 100 days of chaos

6 Opinion: Wash U law professors say Trump government imperils the rule of law

8 'Everything is different': How Trump's first 100 days in office have upended education, and its coverage, in America

11 Student newspapers cover Trump's attacks on DEI, free speech

12 Opinion: The attack on biomedical research — Why should anyone care?

15 News Analysis: Making the case for 'soft power'

17 Foreign aid cuts hurt me — and all of us

20 Georgetown Law says acting US attorney's campaign against DEI violates Jesuit values, First Amendment

21 Opinion: The month that shook our world

22 FCC investigations under Trump could hurt broadcasters

25 Q&A with New York education reporter examines key avenues to getting the story

26 Iowa at center of book ban movement

28 A university, a rural town and their fight to survive Trump's war on higher education

32 Tale of two Missourian alternative airwave icons tells a story of community radio

34 AP's last correspondent in St. Louis takes buyout, cutting back on wire service's continuous presence since before Civil War

36 Court coverage — from 'The Front Page' to the internet

38 Pistor, former Post-Dispatch reporter, tried to reuse the city hall pressroom before his unexpected death

39 Robert Duffy's journalism: Deeply informed, delightfully whimsical

41 Linda Greenhouse: Justice Alito's abortion decision was 'religious tract' with 'veneer of legal analysis'

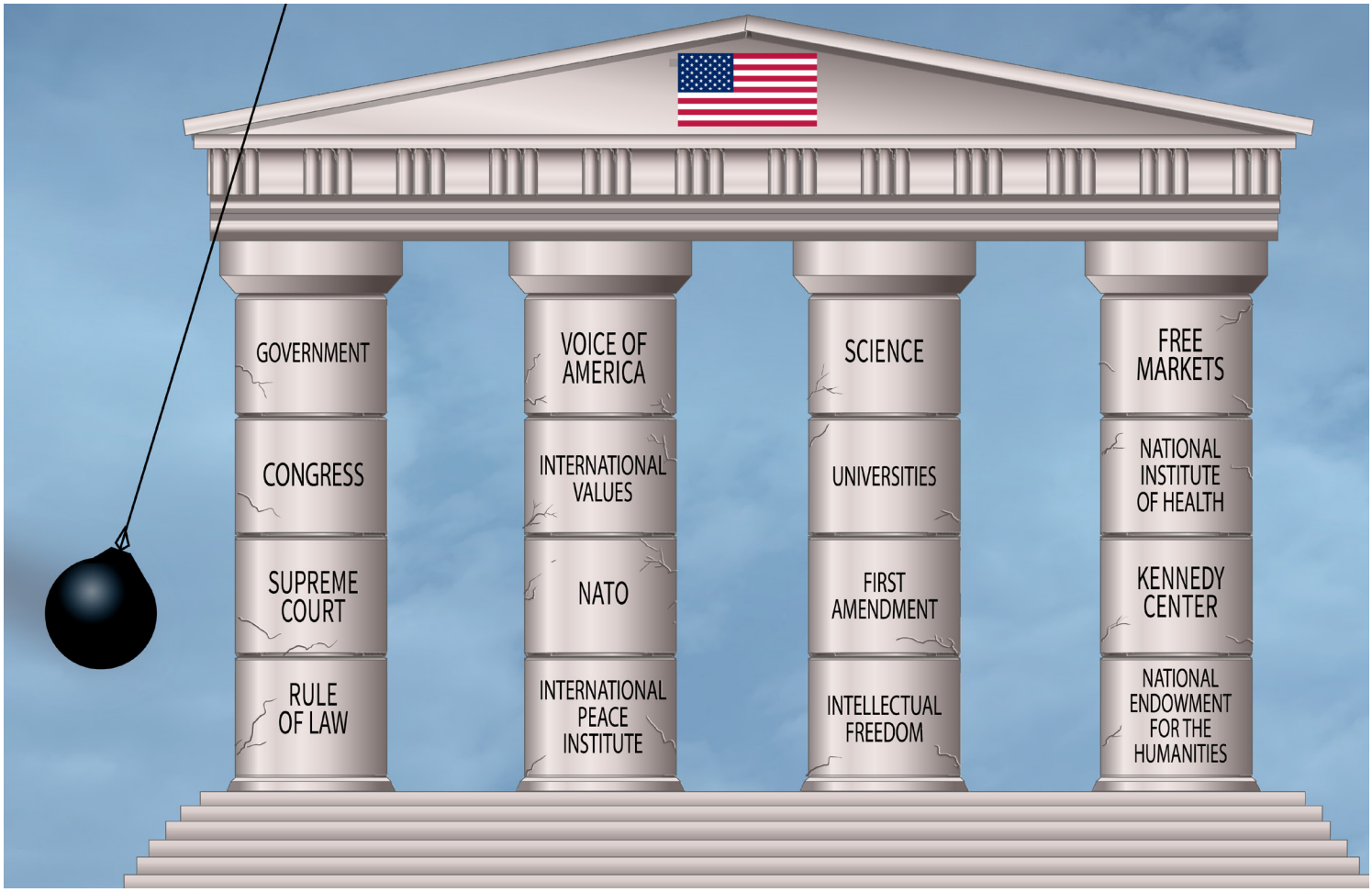


Illustration by Steve Edwards

Publisher's Column: 100 days of chaos

By William H. Freivogel

In a little under 100 days of chaos, President Donald J. Trump has violated laws, ignored time-tested norms, damaged the world's most respected system of higher education, undermined the world's leading network of medical and health research facilities, surrendered America's important instruments of "soft power," endangered the health of tens of thousands of families around the world and detonated a tariff bomb in the middle of the world's economy, wiping out $5 trillion in wealth in two days.

He has called into question the rule of law by ignoring judicial orders, proposing impeachment of a federal judge who ruled against him, and by bullying, threatening and punishing law firms that had connections to lawyers who investigated him. Last weekend his lawyers refused to tell a federal court how it would comply with an order endorsed by the U.S. Supreme Court to explain how it would repatriate a Maryland man wrongfully deported to a notorious prison in El Salvador. Trump is abolishing the Education Department, firing the government official in charge of protecting whistleblowers, cutting off funds for the nation's public libraries and threatening to cut off Title 1 education funds for public schools unless they certify they have rooted out the bogeyman of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. By the way, Title 1 money is intended for schools in poor areas.

Trump has warped DEI into a powerful sword. During the election, he claimed he was running against the DEI vice president. After the plane crash in D.C. and the fires in LA, DEI was a handy scapegoat but never the actual cause. Now, he is inferring that the 2023 Supreme Court decision ending affirmative action means all DEI must be forbidden in education and the workplace.

In actuality, that is not what the Supreme Court said. An institution's pursuit of DEI is protected under the First Amendment unless it results in illegal discrimination against a particular group. After all, the word "equal" is in the Declaration of Independence; the words over the entrance of the U.S. Supreme Court say: "Equal Justice Under Law." It is the value that Abraham Lincoln singled out on the Gettysburg battlefield. Trump's blunderbuss targeting of Harvard's $9 billion in grants was announced without any indication of proof that the university had not protected its students from anti-semitism or "divisive ideologies," as Trump claims. Vice President JD Vance says universities are the "enemy" and both he and the president appear to be acting on that belief, having already brought Columbia to heel. Northwestern and Cornell are next on the list.

Trump's right-hand man — Elon Musk, the world's richest man — has fired more than 200,000 federal employees as he and his DOGE acolytes run amok through agencies and their computer files, no matter the confidentiality. It is not clear how long Musk will be wreaking havoc on the government, despite recent reminders that his plan is to leave within the coming months. Nor has the government come up with an explanation of what exactly DOGE's

status is; members of the administration give conflicting accounts of its authority, membership, leadership and how much its employees are paid. Meanwhile, Trump fired the inspector generals who are the legitimate officials designated to root out waste, fraud and abuse.

At the same time that Trump's tariffs have blown up free markets, he has coddled Russia, cut aid to Ukraine, obfuscated Russia's role in starting the war, shunned NATO's moves to protect the country and generally undermined the Atlantic alliance that U.S. presidents of all parties have sought to strengthen over the 80 years since World War II. The "shining city on the hill" that Ronald Reagan spoke of proudly as he confronted the Soviet Union has gone dark. Trump even turned off Radio Free Europe broadcasts into Russia. At the end of last week, Trump fired top national security officials at the behest of Laura Loomer, the far-right social media influencer who calls provocateur Roger Stone her mentor. It was Loomer who falsely claimed during the election campaign that Haitains were eating pets in Ohio — and in the past claimed that 9/11 was an inside job by U.S. intelligence officials.

Loomer also complained to the White House in March about a Justice Department lawyer in Los Angeles whom she described as a Trump hater. The lawyer was fired an hour later. Shortly after taking over in January, the Trump Justice Department reenacted the so-called "Saturday Night Massacre," of Watergate fame, by firing a dozen top lawyers who had worked on the criminal cases against the president. More lawyers, this time those who had worked on the Jan. 6 prosecutions, were fired a week later; lawyers have resigned, too, as we've seen prosecutors of Eric Adams, the mayor of New York, do upon being ordered to drop charges. The administration's lawyer defending against a federal judge's discovery of "grievous error" in the deportation of a Maryland man to a prison in El Salvador was fired for not arguing "zealous" enough.

Former St. Louisan and acting U.S. Attorney Ed Martin has enthusiastically served as Trump's spear carrier, insisting that it was "unacceptable" for Georgetown Law School to "continue to teach and promote DEI" and demanding the school report to him that DEI has been removed from the curriculum. The dean refused. Last week, Martin, without grounds, said he was investigating whether former President Biden was competent to issue pardons before leaving office. Jack Goldsmith, a conservative legal scholar who served in the Bush Justice Department, wrote that Martin shouldn't be confirmed because "has wielded prosecutorial power recklessly and openly," and is the worst example of the abusive powers that prosecutors can manipulate. Meanwhile, D. John Sauer was confirmed as solicitor general, the government's top lawyer in Supreme Court; as solicitor general of Missouri, Sauer led the frivolous legal effort by red states to try to overturn the 2020 presidential election.

In addition, Trump has targeted big law firms in D.C. with connections to special counsels Jack Smith or Robert Mueller or other perceived enemies by imposing unprecedented sanctions that would make it impossible to function. This undermines the rule of law. Trump's executive orders lift security clearances for all the firms' lawyers, bar federal business, exclude them from federal buildings and require federal contractors to disclose whether they have used the firm. Beryl Howell, a judge for the U.S. District Court, temporarily blocked Trump's order, saying it punished free speech; 500 law firms and 300 former judges filed a brief with the court asking the judge to permanently block the executive order. But some of the biggest firms, such as Paul, Weiss and Skadden, have capitulated and made a deal with the White House. New York Times conservative columnist David French said the firm was making Trump's work easier — and his opponents' work harder — by throwing in the towel before they even attempt to appeal to a legal system that should be built for exactly this moment." Yet the number of law firms capitulating grows. Trump announced deals with five more firms last week that pledged about $1 billion in pro bono work. Pro bono work is supposed to be for those who can't afford a lawyer.

This accounting of Trump's actions doesn't include his most glaring absurdities, like renaming the Gulf of Mexico and Mount Denali while making belligerent advances on Greenland, Canada and Panama. And his promotion of bulldozing Gaza into his very own Mediterranean resort reflects America's "Manifest Destiny," which he dug up from some 19th century graveyard of bad ideas. Last month Trump issued an executive order — "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History" — assigning Vance to "save" the Smithsonian by "removing improper ideology" from the museums, followed by expected special emphasis on Black, women and Native American museums and exhibits. Trump took over the world-renowned Kennedy Center, appointing a new board that made him chair. He also canceled most of the programs funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, including $250,000 for the Missouri History Museum.

Although Trump has touted his administration as a rebirth of free speech, last week his EEOC subpoenaed personal information of hundreds of UC Berkeley professors who signed pro-Palestinian petitions about the war in Gaza. The EEOC claimed college campuses are "fostering antisemitism" and should lose federal funds. French, the conservative columnist said "the atmosphere for free speech in this country is the worst it's been since the Red Scare. This might sound strange, but I'm actually more alarmed by the capitulation of so many powerful legal and academic institutions than I am by Trump's unconstitutional demands…. to rely on the First Amendment, you have to have the courage to go to court, to sue the administration, to secure court rulings and then make the president defy the Supreme Court if he wants to continue his campaign of censorship." Last Friday came the report that the Naval Academy had removed 381 books from the Naval Academy Library, banning access to books like ones about the Holocaust and Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings." Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville lost a $250,000 grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services to train underrepresented students.

Meanwhile, hundreds of students around the country, including at the University of Illinois and Southern Illinois University Carbondale, are receiving private notifications that their visas are canceled. Universities have no excuse for failing to release the numbers of students affected. Student newspapers have received dozens of inquiries from those who fear their columns or letters or photos in the newspaper could be used against them. The result, as the Stanford Daily put is, is "student speech, from our own reporters and those we're reporting on, is startlingly chilled."

AP was banned from the White House for not capitulating to Trump's renaming of the Gulf of Mexico, until a court told Trump the ban violated the First Amendment. Trump's FCC chair Brendan Carr, depicted last week with his lapel pin showing a golden bust of Trump, has begun multifaceted investigations of national news organizations for reasons ranging from "news distortion," DEI programs and running commercial ads on noncommercial public broadcast stations. Trump has said he would love to see public broadcasting defunded.

In this issue, GJR tells the story of Donald Trump's unprecedented dismantling of institutions that are foundational to America's role in the world as a leader of education, health research, human rights and the free exchange of ideas — institutions that make America the most powerful nation in the world.

This is not a time for timidity when so much that our country can be proud of is being torn apart. The Congress is useless and the Supreme Court has been extremely cautious. Our future is in the hands of the people.

Continued on next page

A note on contributors:

Rob Koenig worked alongside me in the Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau. He was there when the Berlin Wall fell. When his wife, Mary Ellen, embarked on a career in the State Department, she and Rob and the whole family began an adventure that took them from Berlin to Moscow to Switzerland and South Africa. They saw first hand the importance of soft power.

Mark Guyer was our neighbor in Bethesda. He would enthrall us with stories of the cutting edge research he headed up at NIH, just up the hill from our homes. He was deputy director of the National Human Genome Research Institute. The genome project was one of the most astounding scientific achievements since the Second World War and came in early and under budget. Only now are medical patients benefiting from treatments spawned from the project. For every $1 NIH spends, there is $2.56 in economic benefit, he writes. Washington University in St. Louis was involved in Guyer's work at the Genome project and current research on Alzheimer's could be affected by the Trump cuts, the university said.

Anya Guyer is Mark Guyer's daughter. It's a science family where the mom, Ruth worked at NIH and later wrote for Science magazine. Another daughter is a medical doctor. Anya Guyer's story is an inside view of one person who lost work because of the cancellation of a USAID contract during Trump's abolition of the agency. She writes: "The impact of cutting foreign aid… will be invisible to most Americans. But the effects will be wide and deep, both domestically and internationally. They will result, literally, in the deaths of many human beings (whose deaths will not be accurately counted, because data collection was also defunded) and in profound suffering for many more."

Molly Parker and Julia Rendleman are two colleagues in the School of Journalism and Advertising at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. They recently published a story – Molly writing and Julia photographing – about what it's like to be one of the 500 regional public universities that teach 5 million people and especially what it's like to be an institution that supports DEI in a region that generally doesn't. It's not Columbia or Harvard, but the uncertainties of the moment are real. ProPublica, where the story originally ran, has generously granted us permission to republish it.

OPINION

Wash U law professors say Trump government imperils the rule of law

Publisher's note: This is an open letter from law school faculty members at Washington University Law School expressing stating that "rule of law is facing grave peril" from the government of President Donald J. Trump

A letter from Washington University Law School faculty to the law school community - April 7, 2025

We are faculty members of the Washington University School of Law in St. Louis.[1] As law professors responsible for educating the next generation of lawyers, we have a special duty to promote the rule of law through our teaching and scholarship.

We are making this statement — in our individual capacities — because, more than at any other time in our careers, we believe that the rule of law is facing grave peril and many of our students are deeply concerned about the future of the legal profession and the rule of law. These concerns are intertwined, as many recent government actions have targeted the legal profession and institutions of higher education.

Although we disagree with one another about many legal and political issues, our concern for the rule of law and the welfare of our students transcends our differences on other issues. We take seriously the precept that the United States of America is, to paraphrase John Adams, a government of laws, not of people.

The rule of law is imperiled when government leaders:

- threaten judges with impeachment, heighten risks to their physical security, or promote unlawful defiance of their authority, because of disagreement with their decisions;
- retaliate against lawyers and law firms because of their prior government service or lawful and ethical representation of clients disfavored by the government;
- threaten legal clinics for their lawful and ethical representation of clients disfavored by the government;
- require lawyers to engage in public acts of submission and to donate time and funds in support of government-dictated causes as a condition for removal of threats of sanctions;
- deprive individuals, groups, and institutions of significant liberties without affording them due process; and
- punish individuals, groups, and institutions for lawfully speaking on matters of public concern.

When the government takes any of these actions, it is an attack on the rule of law, as well as basic individual rights and fundamental American values. As law professors and lawyers who have committed to uphold the Constitution, we have an obligation to speak out against these threats. In that spirit, we condemn actions taken by the government that undermine the rule of law, and we affirm the basic purpose of our work — to advance constitutional principles and strengthen our legal institutions.

[1] The views expressed in this statement are those only of the signatories. We do not hold this statement out as reflecting the views of Washington University, the Washington University School of Law, or any person who has not signed the statement. This letter is inspired by a statement by colleagues at Harvard Law School. We have incorporated some of their language with their permission.

Susan Frelich Appleton, Lemma Barkeloo & Phoebe Couzins Professor of Law

Kathleen Clark, Professor of Law

Kevin Collins, Edward T. Foote II Professor of Law

Marion Crain, Wiley B. Rutledge Professor of Law

Adrienne D. Davis, William M. Van Cleve Professor of Law

Rebecca Dresser, Daniel Noyes Kirby Professor of Law Emerita

John N. Drobak, George A. Madill Professor of Law

Sheldon A. Evans, Professor of Law

Denise Field, Professor of Practice Emerita

Trevor Gardner, Professor of Law

Michael M. Greenfield, George A. Madill Professor of Contracts and Commercial Law Emeritus

Rebecca Hollander-Blumoff, Professor of Law

Lisa S. Hoppenjans, Associate Professor of Practice

Elizabeth J. Hubertz, Professor of Practice

John Inazu, Sally D. Danforth Distinguished Professor of Law & Religion

Andrea Scoseria Katz, Associate Professor of Law

Pauline Kim, Daniel Noyes Kirby Professor of Law

David Konig, Emeritus Professor of Law and History

Robert R. Kuehn, Professor of Law

D. Bruce LaPierre, Professor of Law Emeritus

Stephen H. Legomsky, John S. Lehmann University Professor Emeritus

Ronald Levin, William R. Orthwein Distinguished Professor of Law

Jo Ellen Dardick Lewis, Professor of Practice

Gregory P. Magarian, Thomas and Karole Green Professor of Law

Daniel R. Mandelker, Howard A. Stamper Professor of Law Emeritus

Charles McManis, Thomas and Karole Green Professor of Law Emeritus

Katie Herbert Meyer, Professor of Practice

Kimberly Norwood, Henry H. Oberschelp Professor of Law

Adam H. Rosenzweig, Professor of Law

Rachel Sachs, Professor of Law

Leila Nadya Sadat, James Carr Professor of International Criminal Law

Joel Seligman, Professor of Law and Dean Emeritus

Ann Davis Shields, Professor of Practice

Cormac Smith, Assistant Professor of Practice

Jonathan Smith, Professor of Practice

Peggie R. Smith, Charles F. Nagel Professor of Employment and Labor Law

Karen Tokarz, Charles Nagel Professor of Public Interest Law & Policy

Melissa A. Waters, Professor of Law

Peter Wiedenbeck, Joseph H. Zumbalen Professor of the Law of Property

---

These editorial cartoons were first published by The Columbia Chronicle. They are reprinted with permission.

Illustration by Steve Edwards

'Everything is different': How Trump's first 100 days in office have upended education, and its coverage, in America

By Allie Miller

The end of this month will mark President Donald Trump's first 100 days in office, and in that time his administration has moved to eliminate the Department of Education, ended tribal support for Tribal colleges, removed protections for transgender students, launched investigations into 85 schools and is reviewing billions in funding for colleges and universities.

The sweeping changes and threats aimed at schools he deems out-of-step with his cultural vision for America have been an unprecedented and fast-paced, non-stop story for education reporters in the Midwest and across the nation.

Jennifer Smith Richards, a Chicago-based reporter at ProPublica, has been on the education beat for over 20 years — which means this isn't her first time covering education while Trump is in office. But coverage of Trump's second term thus far compared to his first is unparalleled — "I'm not sure I can overstate this, but like, everything is different," she said.

"It's customary and expected that when a presidential administration changes, so will the priorities of the administration and of the Education Department," Smith Richards explained. "And in this case, what we're seeing is a rapid overhaul of way things have worked for years now, the actual dismantling of some of the key functions of the agency, and it's all happening so, so quickly. And all of that is different than it has been before."

In the just over two months that Trump has been in the White House, Smith Richards' coverage has spanned across states and includes attacks on trans rights in schools, civil rights and changes in the Education Department. Though she has encountered various roadblocks during her recent reporting, Smith Richards said the sheer speed of change has been "exceptionally challenging," as well as overwhelming, prompting quick decision making about what to act on with urgency.

"I don't think we could have anticipated how quickly things like guidance and executive orders would come out," she said. "They're extremely consequential to how schools operate day to day, and that type of information has come out so quickly, and has brought with it significant changes to the policy that the U.S. Department of Education is trying to enforce."

Trump has signed more than 100 executive orders — or written directives — so far. Though these orders might request government agencies to change course, they can't override federal law, and have to go through Congress to become official.

David Jesse, a senior writer for The Chronicle of Higher Education based just outside of Ann Arbor, Michigan, covers leadership in higher education. Between grant cuts, DEI and arrests of student activists on campus, "it's just hard to keep up with everything, and to know what stands out, what's really important, and what's not,"

he said.

Alison Rohrbach, a music teacher at Sunny Hill Elementary School in Carpentersville, Illinois, said she is struggling to keep up with the changes, too.

Sunny Hill is a Title I school, meaning it receives federal funding to assist with educational development for low-income learners. Though the school's funding has yet to be touched, Rohrbach said there is heightened anxiety among her and her colleagues, causing them to ask: "Are we going to be able to provide the education that we're used to providing?"

"It's been hard because the headlines are coming so fast and furious that it's like, okay, I'm going to read this article, and then 20 minutes later, it might be null and void," Rohrbach said.

Shortly after GJR talked to Rohrbach, the Department of Education told schools that they must either sign a certification that they have ended DEI or lose federal funds.

Chicago-based freelance reporter Matt Krupnick, who has been covering higher education for over 20 years, also said covering education changes under Trump so far has been "significantly different" than his previous term, who also described the changes as "fast and furious."

"I think it's fair to say that our democracy is facing challenges like it never has before," Krupnick said. In March he covered the effects the Trump administration's education decisions are having on Tribal colleges for ProPublica.

Some educators feel that the journalism they are consuming is missing some key narratives about how some of the Trump administration's proposed changes could impact their students' lives.

Jennifer Adam is the union president for St. Charles Education Association in Illinois, which oversees 18 attendance centers in her district, several of which receive Title I funding. Adam said from the stories she reads — ranging from national to local outlets — she feels they are not fully informing the public of the "catastrophic impact this could have on our learners."

Rohrbach described the media she consumes around the changes as "painting broad strokes," without addressing specific needs that are met by federal funding to schools, like food for food-insecure students, shoes for gym class and communication devices for kids who need them, and the overarching chaos these changes would cause in their schools if put into law.

At Troy Cronin Elementary School in Shoreville, Illinois, another Title I school, librarian Jill Scarcelli said its Title I funds are used to "purchase books that that students can see themselves in," books that celebrate diverse identities. The proposed cuts to funds have Scarcelli feeling "extremely scared," she said. Scarcelli also serves as the education support professional council chair for Illinois Education Association.

"I don't think that we're seeing enough individualized stories on what the specifics could look like for people," said Rohrbach, who also serves on the board of directors for the IEA.

The uncertainty institutions face is the same that education journalists are facing, Jesse said that the best journalism — from student papers to national networks — is diving into the impact for their readers.

"I think even in these times of uncertainty, it's even more important to be able to have that independent press to look around and to continue to shine the light in the dark corners," Jesse said has been covering education since 2006.

Though Adam and Rohrbach are hoping to see stories that are more nuanced, education journalists like Krupnick said that lack of communication from the federal government — to both himself and institutions he covers — creates an issue. But another roadblock he and other reporters are facing is peoples' fear of speaking out.

Even Krupnick's established sources whom he has spoken to for years, both on and off the record, have become silent.

"I've definitely noticed that there's a real change in how people are feeling about being transparent and public about their statements," Krupnick said.

This is something both Smith Richards and Jesse said they have encountered, too.

"I think that there are people that we encounter who are fearful of speaking out against the vision that the president has for American schools," Smith Richards said. "There are people who have expressed those fears to us on the condition that we not identify them."

And this issue isn't unique to Krupnick, Smith Richards and Jesse.

"Knowledge and transparency are just such important factors in democracy," Krupnick said. "And I'm just like, 'tell me what's going on, and we'll let people know about it.' And that's more a measure of protection than being silent about it."

Issues like the Trump administration's $400 million cut to federal funding for Columbia University and the Education Department's investigation into Denver Public Schools bathrooms have been well-covered, said Jon Valant, director of the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C.

But Valant said there are other questions and issues that need more coverage, including threats to DEI and gender issues in schools, as well as funding that has been withheld from programs like Head Start.

Valant is particularly concerned about the number of schools and institutions that are already complying to Trump's executive orders out of fear of what could happen that could end up getting knocked down in court.

"I think we could be doing a better job of understanding not just the places where there are open investigations, but trying to understand how the education systems as a whole are responding to just the threat and uncertainty surrounding what's been going on in Washington," he explained.

The press is playing a critical role in helping shape the public's understanding of people working in education systems, Valant said, but should focus on speaking to people and groups who are operating in educational spaces with uncertainty.

"I think one of the most important functions right now of education journalism is speaking as clearly as possible to those groups about what situation they are in, and then trying to listen to those voices to understand how they're processing this, and how any decisions they're making now might be affecting students in schools," he said.

Up until now, Smith Richards said she and other education journalists have been focused on what changes are happening at the federal level, but, "going forward, whether people feel comfortable speaking out or not, it still will be our duty to explain what the impact of policy changes and the dismantling of the U.S. Department of Education means to the students and schools and families that experience those changes."

Lorenzo Baber, director of the Office of Community College Research and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, said he'd like to see more nuanced coverage of the research sectors that could be impacted if federal funding were to be cut.

"It's not just funding that helps support research for the sake of research, it's research for practical applications across a width of industries, from manufacturing to farming to science and technology. And so I think that's where I would say, as a scholar, I'd like to see a little bit more coverage in that area," Baber explained also holds a bachelor's degree in journalism.

Though Krupnick said he thinks all reporters should be monitoring these changes closely, sometimes his brain needs a break from consuming politics, just like his readers' might, too.

Even with looming uncertainty and the rapid speed of changes, Smith Richards said most journalists she knows, herself included, are committed to documenting changes and what they mean for schools, students and families.

"Regardless of whether people feel comfortable going on the record and talking to journalists," she said, "we will continue to do our job and document the impact of the changes being made."

Photo by risingthermals via Flickr

Photo by Jackie Spinner

Student newspapers cover Trump's attacks on DEI, free speech

By Scott Lambert

While the national press debates President Trump's DEI initiatives at colleges and universities across the country, college newspapers find themselves at the forefront during a tumultuous time.

The Student Press Law Center issued a special media alert April 4 for student media covering these events.

"At this moment, it is essential to hear from those most impacted by current U.S. policies," the alert stated. "It is our duty as journalists to seek them out. Find the balance required to tell the most accurate story you can while minimizing harm."

Red, blue and swing states are dealing with Trump's orders. The University of Michigan announced that it was eliminating DEI in late March. The Michigan Daily, Michigan's student newspaper, captured community reactions with its story on the elimination of two DEI offices.

The story reported on multiple points of view and also captured the feel of campus. Another story made an argument against using antisemitism as an excuse to punish universities for protests made by students last spring.

Just over an hour's drive away, Michigan State's college newspaper covered how the University is not eliminating their DEI programs. The story questioned if Michigan State would continue to support international students as more disturbing incidents take place.

The job student newspapers are doing makes a difference — especially on campus.

In Missouri, a red state where most universities have eliminated DEI offices and programs, students are covering the fallout.

"It's been a big issue," said Jack Dimond, a Missouri State senior instructor and faculty advisor of the school's student paper, The Standard. "There have been demonstrations and I think they've covered it fairly well."

The Standard continues coverage of DEI fallout and Dimond is satisfied that his students are telling a well-balanced story.

"As best as I can tell, I haven't seen anything cringeworthy. The fact that they're choosing to cover [the protests] could be seen as they're favoring the side that's protesting," he said.

"We haven't had any students worry," Dimond said. "They've shown a willingness to get in there and do it. They've pursued it from a standpoint that it's news and they need to go do it."

But with the March 25 detention of Tufts University student Rumeysa Ozturk, a doctoral candidate, by ICE could scare and silence journalists, foreign students as the arrest came around when she co-authored an op-ed about Palestine.

The Student Press Law Center and 13 other free speech and press organizations condemned the arrest. "Such a basis for her detention would represent a blatant disregard for the principles of free speech and free press within the First Amendment, and we call on Tufts University officials, Massachusetts lawmakers and federal authorities to take immediate action to secure her release," the letter states.

Eric Lutz, faculty advisor to The Elmhurst Leader in suburban Chicago, said the case is jarring.

"I think you have to be concerned," he said. "Whether you have an immigrant student writing or not, the tendency to self censor is there. But I think my students are motivated to get the story."

At Purdue University, The Purdue Exponent announced their move to redact names and images of pro-Palestinian students from every story published to their website since Oct. 7, 2023.

At Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania, the Weekly reported that a student was picked up and detained and then later released. At Southern Illinois University Carbondale, the Daily Egyptian reported in late March that an international student had their visa revoked.

It's not just the deportation of immigrant students. It's an overall attack on free speech.

"It's a general menacing environment right now," Lutz said. "All sorts of soft power can be used to put pressure on universities to [end DEI initiatives] and on students to self censor."

In Illinois, most universities are continuing their programs — for now.

At Elmhurst, the Leader took its president to task for not defending DEI enough, with the faculty following suit.

"A lot of times you have students who want to express themselves through op-eds," Lutz said. "This group wants to do hard news coverage. It's easier for someone to ignore opinion. But when you do well-sourced reporting, it's hard to ignore. It holds people's feet to the fire."

College newspapers are not avoiding this difficult story. They're putting in the work and getting stories out. Many of those stories document the students impacted by Trump's initiatives. Many of the stories are uncomfortable.

The attack on biomedical research — why should anyone care?

By Mark Guyer

Starting on its first day in office, the Trump/Musk administration has attacked many of the basic institutions of American society in ways that are illegal, unconstitutional and un-American. Among these has been the National Institutes of Health, the nation's, and world's, premier medical research organization.

But why should anyone care about NIH? What is the priority of medical research compared to the legal system, the legislative system, international trade, international alliances, foreign aid and all of the other pillars of our nation's strength that have already been targeted? I would argue that improving the health of the U.S. population is right up there among the highest priorities. An unhealthy nation is not a strong nation.

While medical research is generally agreed to be valuable and important, the role of the federal government in funding the research has been questioned over and over again. Why should taxpayer dollars be used to support research? Shouldn't the private sector shoulder the costs? After all, the private sector benefits from the sale of the life-saving products that come from research, so why should it not pay for the research? Two questions repetitively asked are: why does it take so long for the results of research to come to market and why is it so expensive?

I believe it is entirely appropriate for the government to support basic research and I will explain why such research costs as much as it does and why finding ways to prevent and cure disease takes time.

For context, I worked at the NIH for 28 years, retiring about ten years ago. For 26 of those years, I worked at the National Human Genome Research Institute, one of the 27 institutes and centers comprising the NIH. There I helped to manage the NIH's contributions to the Human Genome Project, eventually becoming the Deputy Director.

The HGP was one of the most astounding scientific achievements since the Second World War. The HGP began in 1990 and was completed in 2003 — ahead of schedule and under-budget, so much for the argument of lower efficiency and wasted expense in governmental-supported activities.

But its benefits for human health only began to be realized after its completion. Although slow to emerge, applications of the knowledge obtained are now making an ever-increasing contribution to medical practice. More and more cancer patients, for example, are leading longer disease-controlled, or even disease-free, lives. The accomplishments of this international collaborative effort illustrate some key factors in the success of biomedical research that are now being directly threatened by the administration's actions.

Why is scientific research important to our country?

The understanding that scientific research made a significant contribution to the Allies' triumph in World War II led to the confidence (1) that further improvement of the country's scientific capability would contribute mightily in many ways to the further development of the United States, and (2) that the federal government was uniquely positioned to play a crucial role in the post-war development of U.S. scientific capability. This turned out to be true. Focusing only on the health of the U.S. population, government support has been directly responsible for the amazing reduction in the incidence of infectious disease, now increasingly imperiled, the reduction in mortality due to cancer, heart disease and other chronic diseases over the past two decades, the development of biotechnology, millions of jobs, and multi-million dollars of economic benefit. All of these advances, and many others, provide ample proof of the value of biomedical research to our society.

Why should the government fund science? Why shouldn't that be the purview of private industry?

The biomedical research enterprise in the United States has been a public-private partnership for decades. The government supports upstream basic research, and the private sector supports downstream applied research and product development. But, while knowledge about how biological systems work is critical to, for example, drug development, the private sector will not support the necessary funding for basic research. Basic research does not and is not expected to actually produce useful products, and the results of basic research are usually publicly available. Therefore, the payoffs are too far in the future and are not proprietary to warrant investment by the private sector.

Which biological truths will be the basis for effective new therapies cannot be predicted. Nor can a company predict how long it will take until the information necessary for it to develop a therapy for a particular disease in which it is interested. The private sector cannot plan a business in the face of such uncertainty. But once there is enough basic knowledge, the private sector, driven by profit, will be willing to make the huge investments necessary to develop safe and effective therapies. In other words, the foundational knowledge that basic research forms the crucial foundation that allow the private sector's applied research and development programs to generate the useful products that lead to healthier lives and increased life spans.

The return on investment of basic research is impressive. One dollar spent by the NIH generates, on average, $2.56 in economic benefit. But that benefit usually comes too slowly to satisfy the short-term demands of the private market. Yet it does come, and without it, progress toward disease control would either take very much longer or would not happen. It is up to the federal government to start the process by supporting basic research

Why does basic research take so much time?

Contrary to popular thought, there are few "eureka" moments in research. Rather, much more often than not, a scientist's or a scientific team's activities consist of testing an idea through experiments, then refining, and then re-refining the idea on the basis of the experimental results. Think of a successful research effort as analogous to working your way through a complex maze. The correct path is difficult to find. Decisions need to be made at every step along the way. Some of those decisions are wrong and lead you almost back to square one. You may have to reverse decisions to make a bit of progress, but then you come to the next dead end. In the early stages, you have little idea whether you're on the right path, but the more you work on it, the closer you get to reaching your goal and

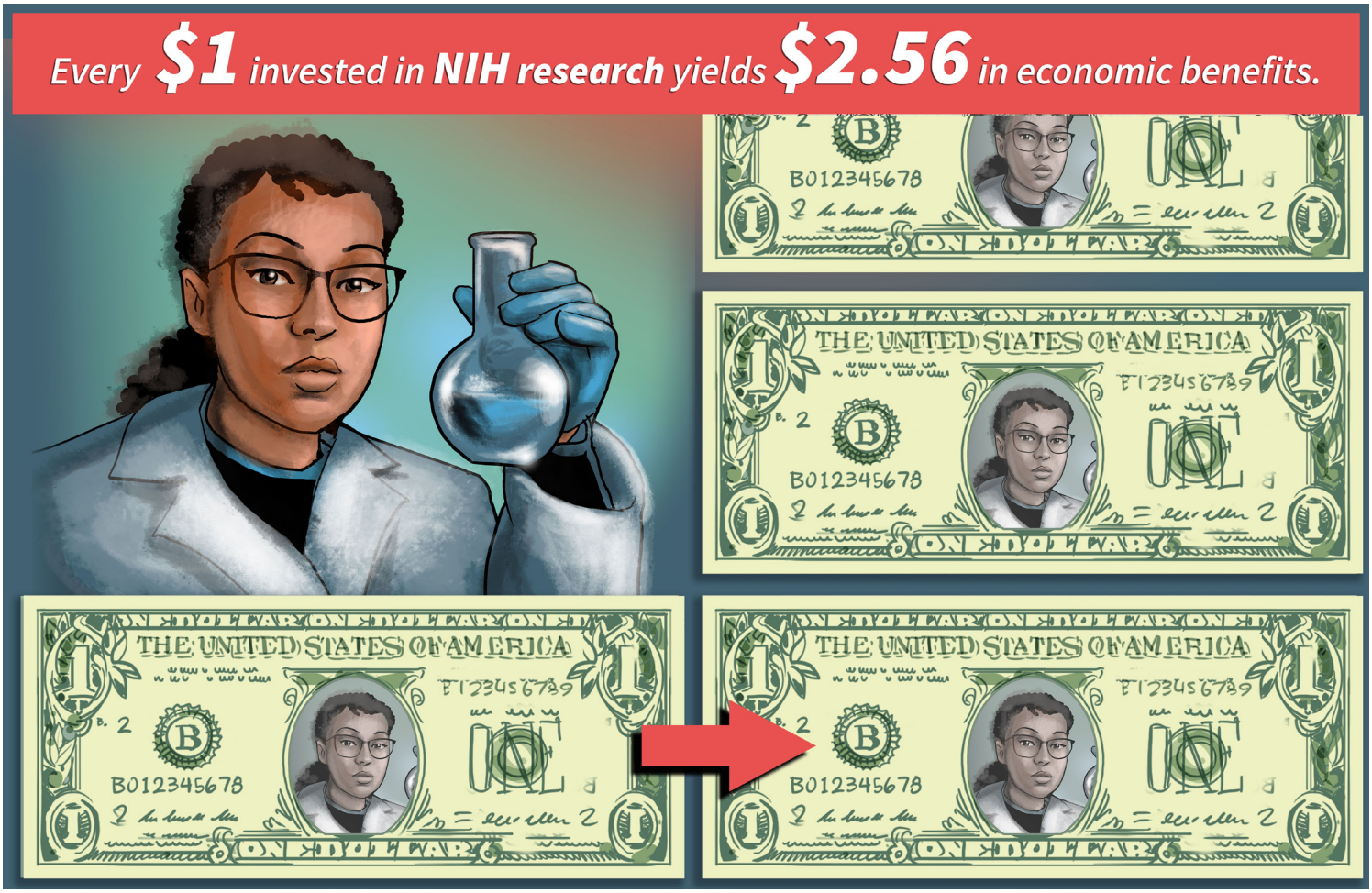


Illustration by Steve Edwards

exiting the maze. Getting out of the maze usually takes much longer than you thought it would or should.

In the same way, both laboratory and clinical research are iterative, cumulative processes in which incremental advances, obtained on the scale of days, weeks, months or years, lead to the accumulation of enough knowledge to generate new, important insights into how biological systems work and what happens when they do not work properly. While the public announcement of the next "great advance" in the press makes it seem as if the advance came suddenly, almost always it has only come after years of research.

Going from basic knowledge to product then involves applied research and development. Time is needed to determine whether a potential new therapy reduces risk and improves outcomes. How safe is it to use in humans? Does it have sufficient advantages over existing therapies? What side effects does it have? Coming up with an effective new therapy takes more time than we would like it to, but when all works well, suffering can be eased, death can be prevented and economic benefit can be created.

Why is basic research so expensive?

As we all know, time is money and research success needs adequate, dependable funding. Scientific research is carried out by people who need to earn salaries. The majority of NIH grant funds are, in fact, spent in the personnel category and cover all or part of the salaries of investigators, lab personnel, trainees, and support personnel whose work is needed to achieve the research objectives.

Scientific research also requires material resources, such as instruments, reagents, animal care and recruitment of research participants. Funds are needed to acquire and maintain all of these. But taxpayer dollars must be spent carefully. So, an application for an NIH grant requires a detailed budget request with an explanation of all the resources requested to carry out the proposed project and a justification for each. The peer-review process includes an item-by-item evaluation of the budget request. The peer reviewers ask what the minimum amount of funding needed is to achieve all of the proposed goals of the research grant and what the effect would be of recommending a lower budget. No one wants to spend more money than necessary to achieve results.

What's wrong with the actions the administration is taking taking against NIH?

All kinds of things!

1. On-going research programs are being stopped in their tracks. As of March 27, the administration has terminated 300 funded NIH grants. These were all research projects that had been validated at two levels of peer review. The first level was carried out by a committee of experts in the relevant field who assessed the importance of the proposed research question; the rigor and feasibility of the proposed research plan; the expertise of the proposed investigators; the adequacy of the proposed budget; and the appropriateness of the length of time for which support was requested. The second level was carried out by a council of senior advisors who evaluated the quality of the initial review and the priority of the proposed research within the overall portfolio of all the research the Institute is supporting. No NIH grants can be funded without approval at both levels of review, assuring that taxpayer dollars are only spent on the research projects with the most potential to benefit the public.

Continued on next page

Yet, the powers-that-be, whoever they are and whose identities I don't think we know — and who presumably have no scientific expertise themselves nor any judgement about the need for any specific kind of research — have arbitrarily decided to terminate those 300 grants, a number likely to only rise.

2. On-going work is being delayed. In the first ten weeks, $1.5 billion of grant funding has been delayed. The delays include both grants on which work has not yet started and grants in which work is ongoing; NIH grants are typically awarded for 3 to 5 years but are assessed annually to ensure adequate progress before the next year's money is released. Effective research programs require continuity. At the start of a grant, staff need to be hired, approvals for the use of animals in research and/or for the protection of research participants must be finalized and equipment and reagents need to be purchased. None of that can happen until the award has actually been made because it is risky to make those kinds of commitments just on the basis that an investigator has been told that the grant will be made.

   As a result, potential staff may be lost to other jobs, the training of students supported by the grant will not begin, or approvals that have been obtained may expire and unnecessarily have to go through the approval process again. In clinical trials, people who have agreed to participate may become sicker and no longer qualify for the trial, or they may withdraw because participation is no longer feasible. For on-going research grants, a delay in the start of the next year may lead to the loss of existing staff who, needing to have a continuing salary, take other jobs. Replacing those staff, even if the grant is restarted, will take time and the new staff will have to be trained. So, the efficiency of the use of grant funds will be compromised. It is also possible that needed reagents will become unavailable, either because unstable molecules will have decayed or specialized animal resources will have aged or even died. For on-going clinical trials, interruption may have a serious negative impact on the validity of the results, as participants may have to forgo the experimental treatment for an unspecified period of time.

3. As mentioned, trained scientists are losing their jobs and training of students has been interrupted. Already, U.S. scientists are leaving to pursue their research abroad. Already, offers of postdoctoral research positions and graduate student acceptance are being withdrawn. Already, people who are considering biomedical research as a profession are being discouraged by the uncertainties created by the threat of further withdrawal of support for scientific research. Pretty soon, the flow of people through the pipeline leading from education to employment will slow down significantly. It will slow down in the United States, that is — production of new scientists will not slow in Europe, China, India and the rest of the world. The United States will fall behind in the competition for innovation and improved health.

I could go on. The bottom line is that the U.S. biomedical research enterprise is under attack for no stated or good reasons. Development of new therapies is being interfered with and, as a result, many U.S. residents will suffer more than they otherwise would. Why? Because some arbitrary group of unqualified people have decided it would be more “efficient” to cut spending. But will it actually be more efficient? For example, last year, in the United States, the healthcare costs for people with Alzheimer's Disease were $236 billion. That is five to six times the annual budget for the NIH, which is addressing many more conditions than Alzheimer's. Research into the causes and prevention of Alzheimer's is the best, and perhaps the only, way to reduce such costs. Is that worth lower taxes for billionaires? Billionaires are just as likely to suffer from Alzheimer's as the rest of us — their increased wealth does not save them from that. But research might.

"Hard power is push; soft power is pull... Hard power is like brandishing carrots or sticks; soft power is more like a magnet."
-Joseph S. Nye

Illustration by Steve Edwards

Making the case for 'soft power'

By Robert Koenig and Mary Ellen Noonan Koenig

After the defeat of Nazi Germany, the United States — in addition to basing thousands of troops there — built dozens of "America House" cultural centers to help Germans learn about America. And when the Soviets blockaded Berlin in 1948-1949, the U.S. sent thousands of flights there — not to drop bombs but to provide food and supplies. West Berliners fondly remembered those "candy bombers" for the rest of their lives.

During the Cold War, when the official news sources of Russians and Eastern Europeans were limited to communist propaganda, U.S. broadcasts such as the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty transmitted American news and music to hundreds of thousands of listeners. At the same time, U.S. cultural and educational exchange programs helped project a positive image of America in the Soviet bloc.

Those U.S. initiatives are examples of what political scientist Joseph S. Nye later defined as "soft power" — that is, convincing people in other nations to want the outcomes that your country wants. Unlike "hard power," deploying or threatening military or economic force, "soft power" aims to co-op people or nations rather than coerce them.

"Hard power is push; soft power is pull," wrote Nye, adding that "hard power is like brandishing carrots or sticks; soft power is more like a magnet."

The U.S. government's soft power initiatives, sometimes called "public diplomacy," have traditionally included international broadcasting; academic exchanges such as the Fulbright program; exchanges of legislators, journalists and other professionals; programs to promote U.S. higher education and the English language; as well as an array of efforts to foster cooperation among international museums, libraries, and scientific researchers. The goals of such programs include projecting an image of the U.S. as a generous, open and just society, as well as demonstrating our international leadership in diverse fields.

In countries where there is a strained bilateral relationship, such as in Russia and China, educational and cultural programs are capable of reaching a wide range of citizens, including students, artists, journalists and civic leaders — and keeping the door open for diplomacy. For example, after the U.S. imposed sanctions in response to Russia's seizure of Crimea in 2014, Moscow started shutting down direct contact with U.S. government officials. But many cultural and exchange programs continued, giving American diplomats and private citizens opportunities to maintain contact with Russian counterparts.

Another major example of soft power is food security and health care, administered until recently through the U.S. Agency for International Development; President John F.

Continued on next page

The Candy Bomber **Photo by Wikimedia Commons**

Kennedy created the organization in 1961, at the height of the Cold War, to counter Soviet influence abroad. Studies have estimated that, in recent decades, such programs in Africa — with shipments often labeled "From the American People" — have helped save the lives of nearly three million children and more than a million women of reproductive age.

In its initial months, the administration of President Donald Trump has taken steps to weaken or eliminate some of the nation's major tools of soft power, including decimating USAID and unplugging the VOA. Other federal spending cuts also might eventually impact the State Department's educational and cultural affairs programs.

While most news coverage about USAID cuts has focused on its food security and health initiatives in Africa, the agency's grants in more than 100 countries also promote democracy and support disaster relief, infrastructure and economic growth. Those initiatives support U.S. farmers, pharmaceutical companies, and U.S.-based non-governmental organizations that purchase and distribute such aid under USAID contracts.

Soft power initiatives also extend to volunteers, including American families that host international students; universities that welcome foreign scholars under the Fulbright and other educational exchange programs; and U.S. professionals who meet foreign counterparts through the State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program.

It is challenging to measure the impact of soft power initiatives, as opposed to the metrics used to assess hard power such as military actions or economic sanctions. However, studies indicate that soft power is effective over time, creating a cadre of foreign citizens who better understand and appreciate the United States. At its height, the VOA's Jazz Hour was listened to by an estimated 30 million people around the world. Host Willis Conover's politics-free broadcasts were credited for fostering connections between the U.S. and people in Soviet satellite states, as well as helping listeners learn English.

Charles Allen, a Clayton, Missouri, resident and teacher of Russian literature who worked for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in Paris from 1980-1989, said studies suggest that "foreign broadcasting clearly played a role in the unraveling of the Soviet Union." That, he says, shows "the importance of soft power as a vehicle of influence."

After the Soviet government opened to economic reforms and the discussion of different views in the late 1980s, Allen says, Russians "turned increasingly to foreign radio as an independent source of critical news and commentary." In fact, Russian President Boris Yeltsin "acknowledged that Radio Liberty had been a critical information channel" when his government survived an attempted coup in 1991.

The Bell, one of the last independent news sites covering Russia, suggested in March that "closing Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty now, when the organization is relevant once again and its work is in demand, seems highly short-sighted." The site said the Current Time television station, co-produced with the Voice of America, is, alongside TV Dozhd, the only Russian-language TV broadcaster that is independent of Kremlin control.

Up until the Trump shutdown this year, surveys showed that VOA's broadcasts in dozens of languages reached hundreds of millions of listeners. The charter called on VOA correspondents to present American policies "clearly and effectively," without regard to the politics of the U.S. administration. During his first administration, Trump had criticized what he claimed was VOA's liberal bias.

One measure of soft power's reach is how authorities in China and Russia reacted to the Trump administration's dismantling of U.S. international broadcasting. In March, Chinese state media praised Trump's decision to decimate VOA, which has often broadcast critical coverage of Chinese and Russian human rights. Russian propagandist Margarita Simonyan, editor of the Kremlin-backed RT network, called Trump's decision "awesome."

Will the cutbacks in U.S. soft power initiatives impact the image of America abroad? A 2024 survey of people from more than 100 countries by BrandFinance — a leader in assessing the reputations of nations and corporate brands — found that the United State and China were the most influential soft-power nations. But the reputation of the U.S. has declined after the divisive 2024 presidential campaign and the report cautioned that the future of soft power under Trump looked uncertain.

That trend is disturbing. While the U.S. is cutting back on its soft power initiatives, China is bolstering its already extensive propaganda and foreign aid programs, especially in Asia and Africa. China's Belt and Road Initiative, which some have compared to the U.S. Marshall for Europe after World War Two, is spending billions on roads, bridges and railroads in Asia and dozens of other countries.

Meanwhile, the China International Development Cooperation Agency, known as "China Aid," the nation's foreign aid and international development agency, moved recently to intensify its emphasis on using foreign aid to advance Chinese foreign policy goals, more than strictly financial and trade goals.

Nye says the ability of a nation to take advantage of soft power can change if the country's policies change. For example, if foreign views of American foreign policy, political values and its culture become less positive, that decline in image will weaken the nation's soft power potential.

Even many U.S. officials who wielded hard power warn against the dismantling of U.S. foreign aid and other soft power initiatives. In an amicus brief filed March 17 in a federal court case challenging the USAID cutbacks, a bipartisan group of former senior officials contended that halting most foreign-aid funding is causing "irreparable" damage to U.S. standing abroad and is helping China, Russia and other adversaries.

Those who signed the brief included former CIA Director Michael Hayden; former Defense Secretaries Chuck Hayden and William Perry; and former top Defense Department official Eric Edelman. They argue that the freeze on U.S. foreign aid funding has "created vacuums of need all around the world, ceding influence and permitting China and Russia to seize those opportunities left behind."

Foreign aid cuts hurt me — and all of us

By Anya Levy Guyer, MSc

As has happened to thousands of Americans in the past two months, my job recently disappeared with a stroke of the White House autopen.

I had been working on a USAID-funded contract to a U.S. university; our project was to develop online training courses for the staff of humanitarian and emergency relief programs worldwide. Then, on January 20, 2025, the White House issued an Executive Order on "Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid. This order lays out the new administration's position that "The United States foreign aid industry and bureaucracy are not aligned with American interests and in many cases antithetical to American values."

Four days later, Secretary of State Marco Rubio issued a directive to the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development to "pause" all funding of foreign assistance programs pending "a review…to ensure they are efficient and consistent with U.S. foreign policy under the America First agenda." (Four days after that, in response to backlash, Rubio remembered to add a "waiver" to exempt "life-saving humanitarian assistance.")

By the time the waiver was issued, my project's leadership had already been notified of "a 90-day pause for assessment of programmatic efficiencies and consistency with United States foreign policy." All work on the project abruptly stopped. Six weeks later, in mid-March, the contract was formally cancelled. Apparently, ensuring that humanitarian workers understand how to adhere to international humanitarian legal frameworks and deliver aid using best practices no longer fits with U.S. values.

Foreign aid was among the first of many U.S. government policy areas facing drastic changes and cuts under the second Trump administration. Foreign aid was likely used as the test case because, unlike domestic programs, foreign aid never directly affects the majority of American voters. However, the effects of these cuts will harm us all over the long-term.

The impact of cutting foreign aid (including the destruction of the agency that managed its distribution) will be invisible to most Americans. But the effects will be wide and deep, both domestically and internationally. They will result, literally, in the deaths of many human beings (whose deaths will not be accurately counted, because data collection was also defunded) and in profound suffering for many more.

As I have already noted, one immediate effect of these cuts is the loss of livelihoods for myself, the thousands of people who worked directly for USAID, and the tens of thousands of people who worked for one of the contracted implementers (including not-for-profit organizations, businesses, and universities in the U.S. and around the world).

It also goes beyond the people drawing salaries directly funded by USAID. All of the people working for businesses and industries that supplied goods and services distributed through USAID projects and used by USAID offices worldwide have also had their livelihoods cut off. Notably, this includes a domestic constituency of the American farmers and others who supplied the materials these programs distributed. In 2020, the government purchased $2 billion worth of food aid from American farmers. (Meanwhile, nearly $500 million worth of crops were reportedly left to rot in warehouses and ships due to the abrupt cuts.) Other commodities and services purchased by USAID from American companies include food processing, pharmaceuticals and medical supplies, transportation and shipping, office and industrial real estate, computers and technology, among others. This loss of income and stable employment creates significant difficulty for many of us.

And what about the impact on the literal millions of other people who were the intended beneficiaries of U.S. foreign assistance? The projections are still being honed, but the programs that have been axed go far beyond basic food aid. On the health docket, funding has been cut for routine vaccinations for measles and polio, among others, as well as for prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, mpox, and malaria. Other program areas included prevention of maternal mortality and cervical cancer, and supporting stronger public health systems around the world to monitor epidemics and provide preventive and curative health care.

The ripple effects of these cancellations will — probably sooner rather than later, if the current measles outbreak in the U.S. is any indication — come back to us. Diseases are transmitted across borders. Cuts to food aid, agricultural development and environmental protections will likely drive more desperate populations into conflict and violence as they seek to survive. Cuts to education, anti-corruption, and democracy building programs will undermine the stability and economic growth of low- and middle-income countries. And destroying the organizations and institutions that have been implementing such programs undermines the existence of functioning civil societies.

Withdrawing USAID support also harms the global reputation of the U.S. at a time when many other countries (notably, but not only, China) are vying for global influence. The Washington Post editorial board noted that, "For many people around the world, aid is…the most visible symbol of U.S. power — soft power — and a tangible demonstration of America's decency." They conclude, "All in all, foreign aid is an extraordinarily effective policy tool…that makes the United States stronger."

No one involved in foreign aid would deny that it is a complicated and fraught endeavor. (Indeed, my personal concerns about the way the industry operated drove me, over the last decade or so, to make career choices that felt more ethical but limited my personal professional opportunities and income.) But ending ongoing foreign assistance programs so hastily is the opposite of efficiency. One advocacy group cited a U.S. Government Accountability Office estimate that the shutdown of USAID alone created $3.34 billion in economic losses. Again, there are real arguments to be considered about whether and how to use U.S. government funds effectively and efficiently for foreign assistance, but this is patently not how it is happening.

It is also worth reviewing the methods by which foreign aid cuts have been implemented, as they served as one of the blueprints for the strategies used by the administration to demolish a wide range of domestic programs.

While the initial policy directives came from the Department of State, the newly created "Department of Government Efficiency" took the lead in executing the orders. (DOGE is led by "special government employee" Elon Musk, a billionaire entrepreneur with no government experience, but whose companies SpaceX and Tesla have received at least $18 billion in federal contracts in the past ten years.)

Less than a week after the inauguration, DOGE staff invaded USAID's headquarters, took over USAID's systems, and began to shut down the agency. They fired the agency's leadership, put most of the rest of the 10,000 staff on administrative leave and removed their access to all

Continued on next page

USA
REFINED VEGETABLE OIL
VITAMIN A FORTIFIED
NOT TO BE SOLD OR EXCHANGED
USAID
4 LITERS 3.7 kg

systems, and prevented the remaining staff from authorizing any payments (even for previously completed work for which payment was due). DOGE deleted the agency's website, removed its sign from the front of its headquarters, and instructed staff to shred or burn documents without following proper procedures. About 60% of USAID staff were living and working overseas — they were also told to halt work, and were then abandoned without guidance or financial assistance to return to the U.S.

The dust from this assault is still settling, as legal wrangling continues. But here is the situation as of March 27, 2025: according to a 281-page spreadsheet, 5341 previously approved USAID contracts have been summarily canceled. An additional 2100 State Department programs have also been axed. This means that the U.S. abruptly cut off funding for thousands of programs, like mine, that were in the middle of implementing carefully designed and approved programs. Management of the 898 remaining USAID contracts is being relocated to an office under the Department of State, placing foreign aid even more squarely in the political, rather than humanitarian, realm. Together with DOGE staff, this process was led by Pete Marocco, a controversial former USAID official who was fired in 2021 after expressing support for the January 6 insurrection. He has now been appointed to the State Department as director of foreign assistance.

The amount of money "saved" by the cuts is debatable — DOGE originally claimed it saved $12.4 billion, while others suggest it was closer to half of that. The total value of the terminated contacts is up to $75.9 billion. In 2023, the U.S. spent approximately $68 billion on (non-military) foreign aid. That sounds like a lot, but in fact it represents less than 1% of the entire federal budget. At that spending level, the U.S. ranked 25th among other donor countries in terms of the proportion of overall GDP spent on foreign aid.

Again, I concur that whether the U.S. government ought to be funding humanitarian aid, economic development, democracy-building, or health systems in other countries is a valid topic for debate — but no such debate was conducted before the administration acted unilaterally and indiscriminately.

Nor were the contracts carefully assessed for either consistency or efficiency. Indeed, the abrupt and indiscriminate cancellation of so many programs was patently inefficient (despite DOGE's supposed aims). Furthermore, according to a U.S. District Court judge, these actions "likely violated" U.S. law "in multiple ways." The judge ordered the government to reinstate certain functions and provide the remaining staff with access to the headquarters. However, despite the post facto judicial rebukes, and regardless of whether further appeals reverse the ruling, the infrastructure of the agency is already decimated.

It is not clear what will happen next with U.S. foreign assistance. As of this writing, the plan seems to be to dissolve USAID by the end of September 2025. Foreign assistance would then be handled by a U.S. Agency for International Humanitarian Assistance and the State Department. Some embassy-based aid positions would remain, but otherwise, foreign service officers would be responsible for administering assistance programs.

One more aside: while many organizations that received USAID funding were non-profit organizations or American businesses, I was working on a subcontract to an American university. The amount of government funding funneled to U.S. universities by USAID was exponentially smaller than that provided by the National Institutes of Health or the Departments of Energy, Education, Defense and Agriculture, among other federal agencies. But the cancellation of USAID-funded projects will have the same effects as these other larger cuts: undermining the U.S.' ability to remain competitive in the world. Universities are already rescinding offers to newly-accepted doctoral and medical students, meaning we are no longer training the next generation of researchers, leaders, and other professionals. Looking ahead, it seems probable that the deep cuts to the Department of Education will eventually reach federal student loan opportunities, on which the vast majority of students rely.

For years, American conservatives have argued that governments in low- and middle-income countries should be funding their own services and research, rather than relying on the U.S. and other donor countries to support them. Yet now, the U.S. is not even funding its own research and services. If universities receive neither research funding nor tuition, then these engines of education and innovation will grind to a halt, leaving the U.S. without the skills we need to build our own cities, grow and distribute our own food, provide healthcare to ourselves, our children, and our elders, and generally remain a leading global power. These effects will then reverberate globally.

Yes, I am freaking out about having lost my salary, and I'm devastated not to be able to make a contribution through the work I was doing. But I am even more concerned by what these cuts will mean for the U.S. and the world in the coming weeks, months, and years — and I think all Americans should be as well. The money the U.S. spends on foreign aid goes far beyond buying commodities, building infrastructure, or paying salaries. It buys us security through controlling threats and building good will for the U.S. This situation is the quintessential "cutting off our nose to spite our face" situation. Not only have we disfigured our national image by cutting foreign aid, I fear that in the end, we may be so badly wounded that we eventually end up bleeding out.

◄◄◄ Recycled old USAID oil cans distributed through food assistance programs are used as a door for a storage bin in a model home in northern Ethiopia. Model homes teach neighbors good health practices for nutrition, sanitation and hygiene.

Photo by Nena Terrell, USAID via Flickr

Georgetown Law says acting US attorney's campaign against DEI violates Jesuit values, First Amendment

By William H. Freivogel

Edward R. Martin Jr., known for decades in Missouri for his fervid devotion to Catholic values, was rebuked in March by the dean of Georgetown Law School for violating the Catholic principles in pressuring the university to eliminate diversity, equity and inclusion from its curriculum.

Dean William M. Treanor sent a tartly worded letter to Martin, the acting U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, that his interference with the university curriculum violated both the First Amendment and the Catholic principle that "serious and sustained discourse among people of different faiths, cultures, and beliefs promotes intellectual, ethical and spiritual understanding."

Martin's demand that the Jesuit university alter its curriculum is part of a series of sweeping Trump administration actions that have chilled free speech on campus. The president maintained, however, in his March 4 speech to Congress that, "I've stopped all government censorship and brought back free speech in America. It's back."

The actions that the administration have taken against free speech are:

- Taking away $400 million in federal funding from Columbia University for not adequately protecting Jewish students from pro-Palestinian protests and harassment. The action came only four days after the administration said it had opened an investigation, an extremely short time for such an investigation.
- Sending 60 universities a letter stating they are under investigation by the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights for not protecting Jewish students from anti-Semitism. Illinois universities among the recipients of the letter included Northwestern and Illinois Wesleyan.
- Detaining Mahmoud Khalil, a green card holder and lead negotiator during the 2024 Columbia campus occupations, as well as threatening detention of other noncitizen students. As of today, the administration has targeted around a dozen students and scholars across the country.
- Trump posting last week on his Truth Social platform this threat: "All Federal Funding will STOP for any College, School, or University that allows illegal protests. Agitators will be imprisoned/or permanently sent back to the country from which they came. American students will be permanently expelled or, depending on on the crime, arrested. NO MASKS!"
- Sending a Dear Colleague letter Feb. 14 to universities threatening consequences for covert discrimination it said was involved in DEI. The letter stated: "Educational institutions have toxically indoctrinated students with the false premise that the United States is built upon 'systemic and structural racism' and advanced discriminatory policies and practices" — citing DEI as an example of unlawful discrimination.

These actions by the administration are violations of the First Amendment, said Greg Magarian, the Thomas and Karole Green Professor of Law at Washington University.

"Threatening to defund colleges and universities over DEI or a supposed failure to suppress disfavored speech is an obvious First Amendment violation," Magarian wrote in an email to GJR. "We should understand these attacks on colleges and universities in their broader political context. Trump is also trying to block research grants to universities, and congressional Republicans are threatening to heavily tax universities' endowments. Those measures, together with the First Amendment violations, represent a Republican effort to weaken universities as centers of political opposition, much like Republicans' efforts over the past half century to weaken unions.

"His Truth Social post about illegal protests should chill and enrage anyone who cares about the First Amendment," Magarian wrote. "There is no such thing as an 'illegal protest.' A 'protest' is a public assembly that seeks to send a message about some political issue. A public assembly of any kind may become unlawful if law enforcement determines that the assembly threatens public order. However, the First Amendment explicitly protects the right of peaceable assembly."

Magarian also criticized the deportation action against Khalil: "People we welcome into the United States should have the same speech protections as citizens, with only limited exceptions for speech rights directly tied to citizenship (such as the right to contribute money to political candidates). Citizens should have full access to noncitizens' insights. We should never empower the government to punish ideas it opposes, no matter the source of those ideas."

FIRE, a libertarian group that often protects conservative campus speech, also criticized the action against Khalil, writing, "There are millions of people lawfully present in the United States without citizenship. The administration's actions will cause them to self-censor rather than risk government retaliation. Lawful permanent residents and students on visas will fear a knock on the door simply for speaking their minds."

The job of attorney general for the District of Columbia, a position Martin has held since Trump was sworn in, entails prosecuting people suspected of violating federal criminal law. But he wrote to Georgetown Law School that he also takes requests for clarification seriously and information and he had begun an inquiry based on reliable information that "Georgetown Law School continues to teach and promote DEI."

"This is unacceptable," Martin wrote. He demanded that the law school tell him by the end of February if DEI "has been removed from the curriculum." Martin went on to say his office wouldn't hire graduates of Georgetown if the school did not remove DEI from its curriculum.

Dean Treanor replied March 6 that Martin's letter "challenges Georgetown's ability to define our mission as an educational institution. He wrote that the "First Amendment guarantees that the government cannot direct what Georgetown or its faculty teach and how to teach it."

Because the First Amendment does not allow the government to interfere with the university's curriculum, Martin's threat not to hire its graduates because of that curriculum is also a violation of the First Amendment, Treanor said. He added that it was also "an attack on the university's mission as a Jesuit and Catholic institution."

Martin graduated from Saint Louis University Law School, a Jesuit institution, after having attended Holy Cross and the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

Separate from the Georgetown dispute, Martin faces a professional misconduct complaint filed by Sen. Richard J. Durbin, D-IL, and other congressional Democrats. It accuses Martin of having dismissed criminal charges against Jan. 6 defendants even though he represented some of them and raised money for their defense as part of his active role in denying that Trump lost the 2020 election.

The complaint to the Office of Disciplinary Counsel, created by the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, accuses Martin of "dismissing charges against his own client and using the threat of prosecution to intimidate government employees and chill the speech of private citizens."

The month that shook our world

By William H. Freivogel

French publication Le Monde headlined Feb. 17 that it was "the week the US shook Europe's world."

Americans could justifiably say it's the month that shook our own.

There is no precedent for President Donald Trump's massive restructuring of the government with a flurry of executive orders, pronouncements, firings and pardons that have overturned norms, violated laws and demoralized civil servants.

Renaming the Gulf of Mexico and Mount Denali. Proposing real estate deals for Greenland, Gaza, the new Riviera. Threatening to retake the Panama Canal and to make Canada a 51st State, all as part of our Manifest Destiny. Who would have thought that ugly doctrine would be revived in the 21st Century?

And that doesn't even include the administration actions that Le Monde said rocked Europe's world. An American vice president actually went to Munich, of all places, to give comfort to right-wingers in the name of free speech, while back home the president blamed Ukraine for the ongoing war with Russia. "You [Ukraine] should have ended it three years ago," Trump told reporters in Florida. "You should never have started it."

Everyone else in the world knows Vladimir Putin started the war. No wonder Ukraine called Trump a Russian-made "disinformation space" Feb. 19.

A year ago, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice gave a speech about the fabulous success of the post-World War II international order created by the United States in the form of NATO, international trade organizations and the support of democracy around the world.

Trump and Vice President JD Vance upended that seven-decade American project in just a weekend, sending Europe into chaos.

If anyone stands in the way of Trump's bully-boy tactics, they are swept aside. The Associated Press had the temerity not to change the name of the Gulf of Mexico. So, Trump banned them from his White House and his plane. He and his press secretary accused the AP of having its facts wrong. The facts he is talking about are the facts according to Donald Trump. If America's new emperor is willing to embarrass himself by declaring the Gulf of Mexico the Gulf of America, then everyone around him must claim it is true, even if the Gulf of Mexico is 425 years old.

Shockingly, the timid tech titans who paid millions for the privilege to grovel before Trump on the inaugural stand were only too happy to abandon the name of almost half a millennium in favor of one ruler's whim.

Meanwhile, the biggest tech titan of them all, the richest man in the world, the owner of the information juggernaut X and master of 7,000 satellites whirling around the earth, Elon Musk, has taken a wrecking ball to Washington, sending his Gen Z tech wizards prying into income taxes and Social Security information and running government numbers through their artificial intelligence machines looking for targets to fire.

The results are wild and false claims about millions of USAID money going to Chelsea Clinton's wedding and Musk's Monday claim on X: "Having tens of millions of people marked in Social Security as "ALIVE" when they are definitely dead is a HUGE problem. Obviously. Some of these people would have been alive before America existed as a country. Think about that for a second…."

Well he must not have thought about it because it isn't true.

It's impossible, it turns out, to get a straight answer on what Elon Musk's actual job is. Everyone thought he was the head of DOGE. But the White House and its lawyers said in a court filing that he isn't. Trump himself said the best title for Musk was "patriot."

Tell that to the New York firefighters who found that DOGE had cut funding for a health study of firefighters who fought the blazes at the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001. Musk's team deemed the study "nonessential," one of the few Trump actions that Republican members of Congress joined in criticizing.

What is certain about DOGE is that tens of thousands of government workers are losing their jobs.

Those poor souls assigned to DEI were just the low-hanging fruit. It almost went without saying that diversity, equity and inclusion was "woke speak" that threatened the meritocracy and had to go — even if each of those values had something to say for them. After all, aren't we all created equal?

It was especially ironic because Trump was eliminating DEI hires in the name of meritocracy, even as he named the least meritorious cabinet in memory — a manager of the huge Pentagon who never had managed anything, an intelligence czar who often supported Putin, an FBI director who calls the FBI the "deep state," an Attorney General who denies the 2020 election and a head of HHS who believes in baseless anti-health conspiracy theories.

Before Trump took office, the United States was the unchallenged leader of the world when it came to medical and scientific research. But with each passing day, this proud leadership role is being dismantled.

Federal support for the overhead infrastructure of medical research is being slashed, with Washington University in St. Louis one of the places that stands to lose the most. Young researchers at the National Institutes of Health are out as are young employees at the National Science Foundation and education researchers in the Department of Education.

There was a modern-day Saturday Night Massacre at the Justice Department when top Justice Department officials refused Trump's demand to dismiss an indictment against Mayor Eric Adams of New York so that Adams could better cooperate in expelling immigrants. The acting U.S. Attorney who stood up for the rule of law, Danielle Sassoon, wrote in her resignation letter that she was making the decision based on her conservative mentors.

"I clerked for the Honorable J. Harvie Wilkinson III on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, and for Justice Antonin Scalia on the U.S. Supreme Court," she wrote. "Both men instilled in me a sense of duty to contribute to the public good and uphold the rule of law, and a commitment to reasoned and thorough analysis."

Meanwhile, Ed Martin, the St. Louis lawyer who was pushed out as chief of staff to Missouri Gov. Matt Blunt, has taken over the U.S. Attorney's office in the District of Columbia and has fired lawyers who were involved in the Jan. 6 prosecutions while he pursues more federal agents involved in the case. Martin, an organizer of "Stop the Steal," is now leading the Trump revenge tour.

On Wednesday, Martin sent out an all-staff memo announcing a new "Operation

Continued on next page

Whirlwind" investigation of those using strong and threatening language against Musk and public officials. The name comes from a 2020 speech Sen. Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer made predicting Trump had "released the whirlwind and…will pay the price" for rushing confirmation of justices to overturn Roe v. Wade. Schumer apologized for the strong language at the time and said he had meant a political whirlwind of opposition, not a threat to his person. But Martin insisted in a Feb. 11 letter that Schumer explain himself. Martin wrote that it was "a personal disappointment and professionally unacceptable" that Schumer had not responded to his inquiries challenging the five year-old statement.

As for ethics, Trump dismissed the head of the Office of Special Counsel, Hampton Dellinger, whose office protects merit-system employees, especially protecting whistleblowers from retaliation. On the waste fraud and abuse front Trump also fired the inspector generals who try to make the agencies function efficiently.

Will the Supreme Court stand up to Trump? It's an open question in that a number of the justices in the conservative majority are enamored of the theory that a unified executive should be able to dismiss agency heads even if Congress passed laws saying he couldn't fire them without cause. One must wonder what is going through the heads of these justices as they see some of their best clerks standing up to the abuses of that unified, unleashed executive.

Trump says American culture will be great again now that he has fired the Kennedy Center board and appointed lackeys who agreeably made him the chairman.

Our family lived in Bethesda for the 12 years that we worked in the Washington bureau of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. The notion that the president would make himself the head of the Kennedy Center would have been laughable, almost Stalinesque.

Our neighbors back then worked at the NIH, the EPA, on Capitol Hill. They were good, patriotic people who worked hard every day for the American people.

That was the 1980s, and it was a time when the Reagan Revolution came to town. The Reagan Revolution is the closest comparison for what Trump is doing.

Reagan changed civil rights policies, including Justice Department support for school desegregation in St. Louis. He tried to give tax breaks to Bob Jones University, a segregationist academy. He tried to end affirmative action. He broke the air traffic controllers union and talked about welfare queens in Cadillacs as he cut taxes for those who actually drove Cadillacs. He campaigned in Philadelphia, Mississippi, to cultivate the southern white boys in the town where civil rights workers were murdered. And he too had talked about taking back the Panama Canal.

But Reagan was a different man than Trump. He didn't throw out the norms of decency. He had a sense of humor instead of coining phrases to ridicule opponents. He often spoke humbly, not as a braggart. It's safe to say the Reagan White House would never have released a "LONG LIVE THE KING" illustration showing the president smiling with a crown on his head, like Trump did after overturning New York's congestion pricing.

Reagan worked out an immigration compromise with Democrats instead of warring against immigrants. And he helped bring down that wall, that Iron Curtain. He'd be shocked that a Republican successor is helping Putin recreate a 21st century version of oppression.

FCC investigations under Trump could hurt broadcasters

By Katie Kwasneski

President Donald Trump's new Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission Brendan Carr has begun multifaceted investigations of national news organizations for reasons ranging from "news distortion," DEI programs and running commercial ads on noncommercial public broadcast stations.

The first of these investigations began two days after Trump's inauguration.

Carr reinstated news distortion complaints against NBC, ABC and CBS made by the Center for American Rights, a right-wing advocacy organization.

These complaints that revolved around the 2024 presidential candidates were previously dismissed by former FCC chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel who found that the complainants lacked substantial evidence of wrongdoing.

Rosenworcel cited the Communications Act of 1934, calling investigations into the stations on the basis of evidence presented by CAR "an overreach of the FCC's 'power of censorship' and an interference with the First Amendment's right of free speech."

In the case involving CBS, Rosenworcel referred to current FCC chairman Carr's decision when he responded to criticism over media coverage during the 2020 election, "[a] newsroom's decision about what stories to cover and how to frame them should be beyond the reach of any government official, not targeted by them."

An order involving Fox, a conservative news station, and its owned and operated WTXF-TV channel was among the docket of complaints as well.

Fox faced scrutiny when renewing the license of WTXF-TV. Media and Democracy Project petitioned against the renewal, based on the parent company Fox's defamation case involving Dominion Voting Systems and Fox's intentional spread of false news about the 2020 presidential election. Fox settled the case for $787 million.

The petition and other informal objections made against WTXF-TV were denied by the Commission for similar censorship issues like the limited scope of FCC and First Amendment protections. But Carr didn't reopen that news distortion case.

Each case was different, but Chairwoman Rosenworcel said, "What they share is that they seek to weaponize the licensing authority of the FCC in a way that is fundamentally at odds with the First Amendment. To do so would set a dangerous precedent. That is why we reject it here."

In a Feb. 12 letter to Carr and Nathan Simington, commissioner of the FCC, Democratic Senators Edward Markey, Ben Ray Lujan and Gary Peters noted that "the reinstatement of the ABC, CBS, and NBC complaints without the reinstatement of the Fox challenge appears to be a naked attempt to target networks upon baseless allegations of bias or personal or political disagreement with editorial choices."

Fox admitted getting the facts wrong about Dominion voting machines. Journalists, however, defended the way 60 Minutes edited a transcript of its pre-election interview with Kamala Harris.

Photo by Jason Isele

Sponsorship vs. advertising

Not long after these news distortion complaints returned, Carr initiated an investigation into PBS and NPR member stations over suspected noncompliance with rules regulating Non-Commercial Educational broadcast stations.

Carr sent a letter Jan. 29 addressed to Katherine Maher and Paula Kerger, the presidents and CEOs of NPR and PBS, respectively.

"For my own part, I do not see a reason why Congress should continue sending taxpayer dollars to NPR and PBS given the changes in the media marketplace since the passing of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967," Carr wrote. "To the extent that these taxpayer dollars are being used to support a for-profit endeavor or an entity that is airing commercial advertisements, then that would further undermine any case for continuing to fund NPR and PBS with taxpayer dollars."

The letter failed to mention complaints or evidence supporting this investigation.

In short, per the FCC regulations for NCEs, these stations "may acknowledge contributions over the air, but…may not broadcast commercials or…promote the goods and services of for-profit donors or underwriters."

On Jan. 30, Maher published a statement in response to Carr assuring that NPR programming and underwriting messaging is in compliance with FCC guidelines and that members of the station are expected to be in compliance as well. She wrote that NPR is confident that the review will confirm their adherence to federal regulations.

Information from the NPR website shows that less than 1 percent of its operating budget comes from grants from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and agencies and departments at the federal level.

In a statement shared with NPR, Kreger said she is open to a review as well.

"PBS is proud of the noncommercial educational programming we provide to all Americans through our member stations. We work diligently to comply with the FCC's underwriting regulations and welcome the opportunity to demonstrate that to the Commission."

PBS receives about 16 percent of its budget from the CPB.

On Feb. 7, Rep. Dale Strong (R-AL) introduced the 'No More Funding for NPR Act of 2025' on the basis of biased reporting.

Section 2 of the act reads "no federal funds may, directly or indirectly, be made available to or used to support [NPR], including through the payment of dues to or the purchase of programming from such organization by a public broadcasting station using Federal funds received by such a station."

Therefore, a problem that may arise from the act is that CPB could prohibit stations from spending their appropriations on NPR or PBS programming.

The CPB website notes that they distribute more than 70 percent of annual federal appropriations directly to about 1,500 local public media stations.

A person with prior experience at St. Louis Public Radio said when most focus groups talk with donors, the donors say the primary reason they give is because of the NPR programming.

The source requested not to be named due to the sensitive nature of their role with the company.

They said that "there'll be local inserts within all of those [NPR] shows and local news within Morning Edition and All Things Considered, but most of the time is spent with national programs and most of the national programs are from NPR."

Continued on next page

"So stations are very reliant on NPR," they said. "One, to cover so much of the broadcast day, but also for building that listenership that serves the audience, and the audience will contribute."

If smaller stations drop out of NPR's network, NPR will have to raise their fees for other stations.

"So it's a spiraling effect that if you lose some of those stations, it's going to impact everybody," the source said.

"PBS is very much the same way," they added. "The station in St. Louis probably carries maybe five hours a week of local programming and everything else is coming from PBS or other national distributors."

The STLPR 2023 financial report showed that the station relied more on corporate sponsorships, which made up about 22 percent of total revenue. Federal funding through CPB made up about 7 percent.

Fred Martino, the executive director of Broadcasting Services at WSIU Public Broadcasting at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, supported this, saying that although the less than 1 percent of federal funding is a tiny fraction of the federal budget, "it is essential, especially for stations with smaller budgets like WSIU."

Martino said that with the assistance of federal funding, the nation is provided with rural access to updates like emergency weather information, news and public affairs, arts and culture, and much more, and that NPR "fits our mission of filling gaps in service," he said, since commercial radio has "largely abandoned news and public affairs."

WSIU serves nearly five million people throughout parts of Missouri, Iowa, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee and Southern Illinois.

According to Connie Johnson, associate director of Finance and Administration of WSIU, "WSIU-FM received $202,434 in CPB funding for [fiscal year 2024]." $352,617 was received from underwriting sponsorships.

Therefore, about 19 percent of WSIU total revenue came from the CPB, and about 38 percent from underwriting in FY24.

"Incidentally, our NPR dues in FY24 were $206,000," Johnson said. That makes it more than their contribution from the CPB. "The remainder is funded through local support."

Mike Janssen, Digital Editor at Current magazine, asked CPB to explain how funding breaks down station by station, and the average amount each gets from the broadcaster.

"Almost half of the rural grantees, which is 120 stations, rely on CPB for at least 25 percent of their revenue. 33 rural stations, many of which are in Native American reservations, rely on CPB funding for at least 50 percent of their revenue," he said during an episode of the 21st Show on WSIU.

"Individual donations represent 28 percent of an average rural station's total revenue versus 40 percent for non-rural stations." Janssen says, which is a reason why CPB funding is more essential to these rural stations.

Other challenges to the practices of NPR and PBS are currently underway.

Rep. Majorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) called both Maher and Kreger to a hearing about their political coverage.

The recent additions of Defund Government-Sponsored Propaganda Act, and the No Propaganda Act could be further supporting evidence for members of Congress to pass legislation that ends or changes funding for CPB and in turn, appropriations for public broadcasting stations and from there the support to broadcaster member stations.

DEI initiatives

In a letter to Brian Roberts, CEO of the Comcast Corporation and parent company of NBCUniversal, Carr announced his plans to begin an investigation into their DEI initiatives. He refers to the Executive Orders signed into law by President Trump Jan. 20 on "ending radical and wasteful government DEI programs and preferencing" and "ending illegal discrimination and restoring merit-based opportunity."

The FCC aligned with President Trump by ending its own promotion of DEI one day after the president issued his executive order.

In his letter to Roberts, Carr announced that he will be shutting down any programs that "promote invidious forms of DEI discrimination" and do not comply with "the civil rights protections enshrined in the Communications Act and the agency's EEO rules."

"PBS completely dropped their DEI [initiatives] from their website," the STLPR source said. "And [STLPR] changed a lot of things that they had posted on their website. They don't use the term diversity, equity, and inclusion. They call it something like community representation."

NPR reported that other companies that have ended their DEI departments around the same time as Trump's order, including Disney, General Motors, General Electric, Pepsi, Intel, PayPal, Chipotle, 3M, Regeneron, and Philip Morris.

The analysis mentions that while some companies told NPR that they are "re-evaluating some of their DEI programs as well as examining Trump's executive orders…most companies have not disclosed the reasons for the changes."

The story of how one college abruptly closed — and kept everyone in the dark

by **MEREDITH KOLODNER** May 18, 2024

Q&A with New York education reporter examines key avenues to getting the story

By Olivia Cohen

Before joining the Hechinger Report, Meredith Kolodner worked at different New York daily newspapers on both business and education beats. But since arriving at the Report about ten years ago, she's been immersed in in-depth education reporting. When Kolodner first arrived at the Report she covered kindergarten through 12th grade; she later moved over to covering higher education with an emphasis in investigative journalism.

In May 2024, Kolodner published an investigation about how one college in Aurora, New York, abruptly closed leaving many in the dark, including students who were in the middle of finals week.

This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.

Q: Can you walk me through how you went about reporting this story?

A: The story came from a tip from somebody I trusted very much because of our past work together. So when she called and told me that there's something wrong at Wells, I took it very seriously. At first it looked like it was just another school closing, but they announced the closing of the college the week of finals.

It wasn't just the situation this college was closing. It was the devastation it was going to mean for students, faculty and staff, and the people in the small community Wells was in. It was so last minute that it was difficult for anyone trying to get new jobs and for students who were trying to figure out where they were going to finish their education. What I wanted to find out was, why did it happen so last minute. There were a lot of theories going around and I really wanted to get the bottom of whether or not this could have been done any other way. Wells was a private institution, so a bunch of the information wasn't public and I couldn't FOIA it, but there were ways to get a lot of information.

I started with regular sources, talking to professors. There were members of the Board of Trustee and the town mayor, and because it's a private institution, it was one of the main employers of the town.

All colleges are accredited by nonprofit organizations called accreditors. They are responsible for ensuring the quality of education and fiscal health of the institutions they accredit. They make the findings public, so I could see that Wells had been put on probation several years before fiscal problems and I got some documentation through their audits.

I was able to see they had created some transfer agreements in the fall just in case they closed, so their students would have somewhere to go even though they didn't tell the students. I could see with some of the filings with the town that they were trying to change their land use permission from "institutional" to "mixed use," setting up so they could sell off some of the real estate for non-educational purposes.

There's also 990 tax returns, with a lot of financial information, like salaries, bonuses, spending on buildings and donations. Often the colleges share information with alumni that might not be public. And if alumni are upset, they're willing to share that kind of information.

Q: Reporters often have to rely on 990s because public records typically aren't available with private institutions. What else should reporters — specifically education reporters — look for when trying to report on these private institutions?

A: In addition to 990s, private institutions need to be audited. Like ProPublica Nonprofit Explorer, they have the 990s there. But they also have audits because you have to hire an outside institution to make sure that your finances are in order. It's another layer of oversight.

Accreditors have to report every few years and visit the campus to go through all their paperwork, basically ensuring the quality of the education. Accreditors are also responsible for making sure the university is fiscally healthy, because if they're not, they can lose federal funding.

The best thing in the private colleges is the sources inside the college itself — administrators, people in the budget office, financial aid staff — often know what's going on behind the scenes. If you can't get the college to hand you paperwork, there are a lot of human beings that have access to that paperwork. A lot of people in higher education are there because they believe very strongly in the need for education. If they think something's being done that's not in the interest of students or faculty, they might be willing to share.

Q: For finding sources, especially when it comes to administrators, long-time faculty or the Board of Trustees, how did you go about finding the right sources to fit in this story?

A: I started in a few places. I wanted to make sure I had professors, staff, students and administrators, so I certainly allowed for people to speak anonymously and off-the-record in a case like this. Their futures and jobs were on the line.

I went on social media to find students, because people were posting on social media about having suddenly been told their college was closing, so it was just a matter of checking whichever social media you think that the students are on.

LinkedIn is a good way to find people who work at a particular place, because you can search by employer. And you can find people who used to work there because sometimes they're more likely to speak on-the-record if they've left.

Alumni networks were really important in this case, because the alumni were very upset about what was happening. The people who went to the school cared deeply about it, so I got connected with a lot of

Continued on next page

professors who were the most in-the-know. When you're in a situation when people are upset, it's not difficult to get people to talk.

It was just a question of making sure I had enough overlapping sources so even if people didn't want to be on the record, I was confident about the reporting. As long as I had three anonymous sources who were giving me the information separately, I felt comfortable with it. There were certain things I know happened that I couldn't put in the story because it would have exposed the sources, so not everything ended up in the story out of respect to people's confidentiality.

Q: I'm curious how you went about walking sources through what the story is about and trying to gently encourage them to go on the record if they can. How did you build a safety net for them?

A: It really depended on the person. I asked them, "tell me what your concerns are about your name being out there," and "what is it that you're concerned that might happen?" In a lot of cases, they're right. It could be a problem for them. In those cases, I wasn't going to ask someone to risk their employment. It wasn't that kind of story to put everything on the line.

I showed compassion and understanding about what they could be risking, and the tough situation they were in. I asked them if there was anyone else who might talk on the record. Some of those people became very active behind the scenes, helping to put pieces together because they cared.

I hope they could tell I cared too. I wasn't just talking to them so I could get the story. It wasn't only transactional. I genuinely did care what was going to happen to them and their families, and was not interested in doing something to put their livelihoods at risk. Just because they didn't want their name used didn't mean they didn't care.

Q: You mentioned Wells was put on probation. How often does that happen where a college is on probation?

A: It's a major red flag because accreditors are not in the business of shutting down institutions. They understand that being on probation could impact enrollment and what a downward spiral that is. What was striking to me was the extent to which Wells was on probation, and got taken off when the financials still looked shaky. It takes a lot to be put on probation, so if reporters see that it's certainly worth looking into, because that means there are significant problems. There's a database of accreditors and their actions the federal government peeks at, called the Database of Accredited Secondary Institutions and Programs. There you can look up schools and see their accreditation records.

There's also something called "Heightened Cash Monitoring." If a school is on that, there's a significant financial concern. It might not give you tons of information but you can see a whole list, but it is published quarterly. Once you're on Heightened Cash Monitoring, it's bad. That's not a great situation to be in, because it means the federal government is considering withholding federal funds.

Q: If a reporter wanted to look into a different institution in a similar way you did, what should they look for?

A: In addition to the 990s and the accreditors, see if the institution gets any kind of federal aid. If you're a private college but you have any students who are on Pell Grants or are using federal loans, then the institution is taking federal aid. That means you're a title for school, and you have to report a bunch of information to the federal government. Even if you're not a title for school, there are still reporting requirements.

There's a federal database called IPEDS, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, that has an enormous amount of information, like graduation rate, enrollment, number of students and demographics.

There's also a financial health section. There you can see the change in net assets and the total operating revenues. All these details tend to lag by a year, but it has so much information in it.

There's also a database called College Scorecard, which has just an overwhelming amount of data in it, like the average debt a student graduates with, net price, average test scores, median earnings, employment records and so much more. If you can think of it, they're probably collecting it.

Q: After reporting about Wells College, do you suspect this is happening at other colleges?

A: Absolutely, there's no question. I did the Wells story, and then a month later it happened at three other colleges, but one of them got saved by the alumni. There's a declining birth rate, so that's part of what's going on with college closures, but the cost of college is really the main thing. It's so expensive, so fewer students can afford to go to these colleges.

If you see a college where enrollment has been dropping a while — and it's below a thousand students — that is certainly something. And if they're discounting tuition, that would be something worth looking at more closely.

We had a college closure crisis, and then COVID hit, making it worse. The federal government gave colleges money, so there was a rebound, and colleges stopped closing for a while, but the COVID money dried out, and that's why you saw a big wave of closures last year.

Iowa at center of book ban movement

By Elizabeth Tharakan

Iowa is one of the leading states for book bans in America, second only to Florida, according to PEN America.

Earlier this year, Iowa's state Board of Education adopted the rules for a sweeping 2023 education law. The law — and the rules that enforce it — ban "sexual content" in school library books and require them to be "age appropriate."

The law also bans both discussion and instruction through sixth grade pertaining to gender identity and sexual orientation. The law also requires school administrators to alert a student's guardian if the child wants to use a different name or pronouns.

"We've definitely been paying closer attention to lower ed as these things have been coming out. We've been doing a bunch of angles," said Grace Olson, a K-12 reporter for The Daily Iowan. "There's a mobile library that's basically a bus called the Antelope Lending Library. We talked to the people who run a library on wheels to be more accessible to students around the city who can't commute."

As the state board debated the rules, the Des Moines Register conducted a statewide survey and found that hundreds of Iowa schools had not removed any books under the law, leading to the removal of more than 3,000 books — including The Color Purple by Alice Walker and The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood.

Other books include The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini and Looking for Alaska by John Green.

The ACLU of Iowa and other groups have fought back against the ban.

"Putting restrictions on these books violates the free speech rights of students to access information. It fails to recognize a difference in maturity between a second grader and a senior in high school and they have different educational interests," said Grant Gerlock, assistant news director of Iowa Public Radio.

Photo by Marie Coleman via Flickr

Many of the banned books deal with identity-based experience, like that of being a woman, a person of a specific race, or someone exploring their sexuality.

"I wrote a story about the student reactions and how queer students are scared for their rights," Olson said. "If you come from a more conservative family, a lot of [these books are] how LGBTQ+ [students] find their identity and find community with other people. We have seen a lot of students come into school board meetings to voice their opinions. One of the titles that got banned was 'The Rape of Nanking' and they were talking about how they're erasing history in banning titles."

Iowa Public Radio had a talk show about the law and its impact; another part of the show was about how schools are figuring out how to implement the law. There's confusion about which books violate the law, so some schools have been more conservative than others about which books they remove.

"We cover what's happening in schools, how teachers talk — we talk to a few teachers on air about how it changes their ability to teach books that they feel deserve to be part of a student's education," Gerlock said. "You can have these books. You can't have these other books. Teachers feel they're losing the opportunity to put some issues before students that can lead to valuable discussions."

The Iowa State Education Association is a union that initiated a lawsuit blocking the book ban. Other plaintiffs include Penguin Random House; ISEA members and educators Dan Gutmann and Mari Butler-Abry; an Iowa parent and a high school student; and four bestselling authors: Laurie Halse Anderson, John Green, Malinda Lo, and Jodi Picoult, whose books have been banned or removed from Iowa school shelves. But the suit failed. In August 2024, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit sent the lawsuit back to a lower court, allowing the law to take effect just before students go back to school.

"Iowa families, and especially LGBTQ+ students who will again face bullying, intimidation, and censorship as they return for a new school year, are deeply frustrated and disappointed by this delay. Denying LGBTQ+ youth the chance to see themselves represented in classrooms and books sends a harmful message of shame and stigma that should not exist in schools," said Lambda Legal, the ACLU of Iowa and Jenner & Block in a joint statement.

The SIU Equine Science barns are seen at sunrise Tuesday, March 18, 2025, in Carbondale, Illinois.

Photos by Julia Rendleman for ProPublica

A university, a rural town and their fight to survive Trump's war on higher education

The administration's research funding and DEI cuts present an existential threat to regional public universities like Southern Illinois University, the economic backbone of the conservative rural region it serves.

By Molly Parker, Capitol News Illinois
ProPublica Local Reporting Network

I grew up off a gravel road near a town of 60 people, a place where cows outnumber people.

Southern Illinois University, just 40 miles north, opened up my world. I saw my first concerts here, debated big ideas in giant lecture halls and shared dorms with people who looked like no one I'd ever met. Two of my most influential professors came from opposite ends of the political spectrum.

SIU was the only four-year college within reach when I enrolled here in the fall of 2000 — both in miles and cost. And it set me on the path to who I would become. That's why I accepted a job here teaching journalism two years ago. It is still a place of opportunity, but I was struck by how fragile it had become — a fraction of its former size, grappling with relentless enrollment and budget concerns.

Now, it faces new threats. The Trump administration has proposed cuts to research and labs across the country; targeted certain schools with diversity, equity and inclusion programs; and signed an executive order to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education, which manages student loans. State officials estimate that proposed funding reductions from the National Institutes of Health alone would cost SIU about $4.5 million.

In addition, conservative activists are on the lookout for what they deem "woke" depravity at universities. This is true at SIU as well, where students received emails from at least one conservative group offering to pay them to act as informants or write articles to help "expose the liberal bias that occurs on college campuses across the nation."

Schools like SIU, located in a region that overwhelmingly voted for President Donald Trump, may not be the primary targets of his threatened funding cuts, but they — along with the communities they serve — stand to lose the most.

There are nearly 500 regional public universities across the U.S., serving around 5 million students — about half of all undergraduates enrolled in public universities, according to the Alliance for Research on Regional Colleges at Appalachian State University. These institutions of higher learning span

Edwin Linson performs to a multigenerational crowd Saturday, March 15, 2025, at Tres Hombres in Carbondale, Illinois.

nearly every state, with many rooted in rural areas and communities facing high unemployment, childhood poverty and limited access to medical care. They play a vital role in lifting up struggling individuals — and in some cases, entire communities that could very easily die out without them.

While Trump's actions have primarily targeted high-profile institutions like Columbia University and the University of Pennsylvania, some regional schools are also under investigation for alleged racial discrimination tied to DEI programs. (So far, SIU hasn't been named in any federal probes.)

"This is definitely one of those baby-in-the-bathwater moments," said Cecilia Orphan, an associate professor of higher education at the University of Denver, who is a lead researcher with the regional colleges alliance. While the administration has "a bone to pick with a particular type of institution," she said, "there are all these other institutions that serve your community, your constituents."

Regional schools like SIU tend to operate with fewer resources than their counterparts, relying on federal and state money to support both the students and the school. Greater shares of students rely on need-based federal financial aid like Pell Grants, low-cost student loans and subsidized student work programs.

And in terms of research, while attention goes to large, elite schools, hundreds of the schools spending at least $2.5 million on scientific studies — the threshold for qualifying as a research school — are regional public universities. SIU pumps $60 million annually into research. About a quarter of that money comes from the federal government.

At SIU, as at other regional universities, many research projects focus on overlooked issues in their own backyards. Here that means studying ways to help farmers yield stronger crops, to deal with invasive species in the waterways, and to deliver mental health care to remote schools.

"We are at a crossroads and facing a national crisis. It is going to have far-reaching consequences for higher education," said Mary Louise Cashel, a clinical psychology professor at SIU whose research, which focuses on youth violence prevention among diverse populations, relies on federal funding.

Supporters of Trump's proposed research funding cuts say schools should dip into their endowment funds to offset the recent cuts. But SIU's $210 million endowment, almost all of it earmarked for specific purposes, is pocket change compared with Ivy League schools like Yale, which has a similar student population size but a roughly $41 billion endowment. At present, SIU faces a $9.4 million deficit, the result of declining enrollments and years of state budget cuts; there is no cushion for it to fall back on.

Intertwined with SIU's fate is that of Carbondale, a town of 21,500 about 50 miles from the borders of Kentucky and Missouri. Since its founding in 1869, the university has turned Carbondale into a tiny cultural mecca and a powerful economic engine in an otherwise vast, rural region that has been battered by the decline of manufacturing and coal mining. Three decades ago, SIU and Carbondale felt electric: Lecture halls overflowed; local businesses thrived on the fall surge of students; The Strip, a longstanding student hangout, spilled over every weekend, music rattling windows into the early morning hours.

The "Dirty Dale," as the town is affectionately known, still carries traces of its college-town energy, and SIU remains the largest employer in the region. But there's an undeniable fade as the student population is now half the size it was in the 1990s. Some of the local anchor establishments along The Strip have vanished. Now, more cuts threaten to push the university, and the town that depends on it, to a breaking point.

Jeff Vaughn, a retired police officer who has owned Tres Hombres restaurant and bar in the heart of town for the past 10 years, says the school, though smaller, still has a huge impact on businesses' bottom lines.

"It's dollar bills coming into the city" that

wouldn't be here otherwise, he said. "It's the people who work there, the people going to school there — every part of it brings money into the city. A basketball game happens, people come into town and they usually go out to eat before the game."

Even before the Trump administration began its cuts in academia, it was clear to regional leaders that the school and the community needed to do more. A 2020 report by a regional economic development agency issued a warning: "The region can no longer sit idle and let SIU tackle these issues on their own."

The Rev. Joseph A. Brown, a professor of Africana studies at Southern Illinois University, calls federal orders on higher education "epistolary drones."

"Bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb," Brown said, "and everybody's running and ducking."

Brown spoke by phone in late February, his oxygen tank humming in the background after a bout of pneumonia. While he was in the hospital, his inbox and phone were blowing up with panicked messages about the federal directive that schools eliminate all diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

That's because diversity also means something more in regional public universities: Many students at SIU come from families that are poor, or barely middle class, and depend on scholarships and mentorship to succeed. Paul Frazier, SIU's vice chancellor for anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion, said the way DEI has been politicized ignores what it actually does: "Poor doesn't have a color."

But beyond helping students, DEI is also about the school's survival.

In 2021, SIU Chancellor Austin Lane rolled out Imagine 2030 — an ambitious blueprint for rebuilding SIU Carbondale. It called for doubling down on research, expanding student success programs and, at its core, embedding diversity into how the university operates, including in the recruitment of students, hiring and training of faculty and staff, and creation of programs that offer extra help to students struggling to keep up in their classes. It also called for growing SIU's enrollment to 15,000.

SIU won't reach that goal without targeted recruitment. "You can't do that without bringing more of the largest-growing population, which is Latinx and Hispanic students," Frazier said. "It'll be like an old Western," Frazier said of the risks of further eroding SIU. "It'll be a ghost town."

SIU is offering marketing materials in Spanish for the first time in years. Similar efforts are going into reigniting passion for SIU throughout Cook County, home to Chicago; near St. Louis, and in high schools close by.

While the plan was new, the desire to bring in students from a wide range of backgrounds was not. From the start, SIU grew against the grain by embracing diversity in a region that often didn't.

In 1874, two Black women enrolled in the school's first class. A few years later, Alexander Lane became SIU's first Black male student and then its first Black graduate, according to research by an SIU history professor. Born to an enslaved mother in Mississippi, Lane graduated and became a teacher, then a doctor, then a lawmaker in the state Capitol. Today, a scholarship in his name helps students gain internships in state government.

During World War II, SIU expanded to accommodate returning soldiers on the GI Bill. It designed parts of campus with accessibility in mind for wounded veterans in hopes of drawing students and boosting enrollment.

By 1991, the student body peaked at nearly 25,000. And even amid significant changes that hurt enrollment, by 2010 it still had 20,000.

Alexander Lane, born to an enslaved mother in Mississippi, graduated from SIU and went on to become a teacher, physician and lawmaker in the state Capitol.

The Broad Ax newspaper

In the decade that followed, SIU lost nearly 9,000 students—a nearly 45% drop. A lot happened, but one decision proved fateful: Concerns had surfaced that SIU was enrolling underprepared Black students from inner-city Chicago and failing to support them. At the same time, the university wanted to reshape its image, positioning itself as a world-class research institution. Officials targeted a different type of student and stopped recruiting as heavily in Cook County.

This era also saw a state budget crisis, and high-level leadership churned amid constant drama. (The university had seven chancellors between 2010 and 2020.) Eventually, it wasn't about pulling away from Cook County — it was about having no direction at all. And by the end of the decade, SIU had fewer than 12,000 students. By the time the chancellor unfurled Imagine 2030, it was clear that diversity — in all its forms — was the only path forward.

Clawing Its Way Back

It's easy to destabilize a school. But restoring it? That's a much harder challenge.

Still, recently, it has felt like SIU has been clawing its way back. There have been two straight years of enrollment gains, driven in part by an influx of students coming from Southern Illinois and again from Cook County, as well as by growing online programs. And in late February, the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, which ranks universities by research spending, elevated SIU to its "very high" Research 1 status. In academic circles, it's a big deal — putting SIU on the academic research map and bestowing it a status symbol that helps recruit top faculty and students.

"It's a great day to be a Saluki," SIU President Dan Mahony said, referencing SIU's canine mascot, at a February celebration of that promotion. Then there was a pop, and confetti rained down.

But the federal financial directives and cultural wars roiling higher education are, once again, unsettling the campus and wider community. Things escalated earlier this month when SIU became a new target for the right: A social media account known for targeting LGBTQ+ people and DEI initiatives, Libs of TikTok, posted about an SIU professor who had uploaded explicit photos of himself online. The post, about an openly gay School of Medicine professor who has been publicly critical of Trump, took off, racking up more than 3 million views and hundreds of shares and comments.

"LoTT INVESTIGATION: LGBTQ professor at a Public University posts extreme p*rnographic videos of himself m*sturbating ON CAMPUS," it read.

His employee profile quickly disappeared from the school's website, and within days, SIU officials announced he was no longer employed by the university; he was subsequently charged with two misdemeanor counts of public indecency, and an arraignment hearing is scheduled for late April. But the controversy made SIU, not just the professor, a target. The post also took SIU to task for promoting itself on a hiring website as an "anti-racist" community. "SIU receives tens of millions of dollars from the federal government. SIU is violating Trump's EO and should be stripped of their federal funding," it read, tagging Elon Musk's cost-cutting federal Department of Government Efficiency.

The irony is high: While Carbondale, where the school is located, is a solidly blue island, it is surrounded by a conservative rural region hanging in the balance.

Across the nation, universities are eliminating or rebranding DEI offices to avoid federal scrutiny. SIU isn't backing down.

"As a university, we need to stay the course," Phil Gilbert, chair of SIU's Board of Trustees and a longtime federal judge appointed by George H.W. Bush, said at a recent board meeting. "I can't think of an institution more important to diversity, equity and inclusion than an educational institution, because education is the bridge to tomorrow for everyone.

A view of Carbondale facing east is seen at sunset, March 19, 2025.

A mix of empty businesses and city buildings can be seen along Walnut Street March 19, 2025, in downtown Carbondale, Illinois.

Tale of two Missourian alternative airwave icons tells a story of community radio

By Don Corrigan

In an age of digital media, podcasts and streaming, the good-old-days of community radio seem to be at an end — not with a bang or even a whimper. It's more about lawyers conversing in bankruptcy court.

In St. Louis, KDHX is deep in the red and close to pulling the plug. That's not the story 100 miles to the west in Columbia. That's where KOPN fans insist community radio is alive, well and making noise for the future.

For months, headlines in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch have been full of doom and gloom for the city's alternative radio station at 88.1 FM. As KDHX flounders, its supporters retell its 38 years of broadcasting history.

Some radio historians would date the genesis of KDHX to KDNA, a radio ancestor operating from 1968 to 1973. KDNA was seat-of-the-pants, psychedelic and alternative. KDHX picked up the same vibe when it hit the air in 1987.

That was then, this is now; stories are bannered with boldface words like "chaos" and "bankruptcy." A front-page, two-deck headline at the end of March in the Post-Dispatch declared: "KDHX will go off air if sale is approved."

The March 27 story reported the station agreed to sell its license and its broadcast equipment to a national network of evangelical radio stations. Under the arrangement, KDHX would keep its studio and may continue to produce content on-line.

For a station with a radio tradition that has been earthy, irreverent and sometimes downright sacrilegious, it's the ultimate insult to now be gobbled up by a religious behemoth like K-LOVE with 589 stations across the country.

K-LOVE describes itself as an outlet for Christian music artists, faith and devotional programming — all dedicated to keeping wholesome worship flowing. The network creates media to encourage relationships with Jesus Christ, and, in combination with its sister network Air1, claims to be the largest Christian music radio in the nation.

In contrast, community radio has been a refuge from commercial broadcast conglomerates. It has catered to esoteric musical interests. Community radio has often provided content for religious minorities, immigrants, LGBTQ and others poorly served by major media outlets.

KOPN: 50 Years & Counting

KOPN Radio, 89.5 FM, is appropriately situated in Missouri's ultimate college town of Columbia. Many of its veteran supporters and broadcasters got acquainted with KOPN as students. It's not an exaggeration to say some grads stayed in Columbia because of KOPN.

Self-described as the "Voice of the Community," KOPN's commemorative 50th anniversary book tells tales of offbeat broadcasting from the time it hit the airwaves on March 3, 1973, with a mere 10 watts of power.

The station has had programs in Malaysian, Mandarin and Spanish. KOPN has hosted content on feminism, gay liberation, Black power, Hatha yoga, the occult, Zen Buddhism, Ken Kesey and beat poetry. Music literally runs the gamut.

"We even had a program where we went to give the inmates in prison in Jefferson City a voice," recalled Linda Day, treasurer of the community radio's board. "We've always been about diversity and giving voice to people who aren't usually heard.

"It helps for us to be in a college town," added Day. "We've had students wander in who just want to know about radio. Unless you are a broadcast student at Mizzou, you are not going to be doing radio at the university."

Day and other longtime KOPN volunteers like Kevin Walsh and Ed Herrmann, president of the radio's board of directors, can tell community radio tales from both behind the studio microphone and in remote locations.

They share memories about on-air oddities like Steve Donofrio, otherwise known as "Radio Ranger," who started his KOPN adventure in 1983. Donofrio savors his show's "info-tainment" segments Tree Time, Wildflower of the Week, Critter du Jour, all-the-while weaving in honky tonk, rockabilly and delta blues hits.

For Day, a bittersweet and daunting time involved moving the station from 915 East Broadway in downtown Columbia to a new space at 401 Bernadette Dr., not too far from bustling Stadium Boulevard on the west side of town.

"We left the crumbling, old, duct-taped carpet on the creaky, cutting room floor," recalled Day. "We left some emotional dust and a few unsolved mysteries, and more than a few wires all strung about."

On a tour of KOPN, Herrmann points to rows and rows of recordings moved to its new headquarters — 35,000 LPs and 34,000 CDs to be exact. A few LPs are stamped as property of KDHX, indicating that some trading and cross-pollination has taken place between KOPN and its counterpart in St. Louis.

Look east in horror

Staffers and supporters at KOPN look at what's happening at "sister station" KDHX in St. Louis with horror. Board president Herrmann notes that KOPN is in good shape, in the black money-wise and likely to pay off the mortgage on its new headquarters within five years.

Herrmann, Day and Walsh express regret and sympathy over what's happening with community radio in St. Louis. They have lots of questions about how things could go so wrong. Among them:

- Did KDHX bite off more than it could chew when it moved to a flashy new headquarters in the Grand Center Arts District? Was it wise to move from the old, funky location on Magnolia in South St. Louis?
- How could management start firing so many popular, volunteer, on-air DJs in 2023? Conversely, did the volunteers doom KDHX and engage in "internal cannibalism" when they implored contributors to boycott KDHX and stop sending in their money?
- A bankruptcy lawyer was recently quoted as saying the station could be more than $2 million in debt. Where was the board of directors when KDHX leadership began running up obligations to creditors? Weren't red flags raised over red ink?
- Is community radio in St. Louis at a disadvantage because there are so many competing non-profits in the area? Could contributor support be a mile wide, but only inches deep because the region is so fractured?

"We all know that the first thing you get asked in St. Louis is 'where did you go to high school,'" said Day. "The people there sometimes seem to be on 100 different planets — not a lot of cohesion. Is that an issue for KDHX?

"Here, people have a loyalty to Columbia and want to see the community and its institutions succeed," said Day. "We have very loyal followers and contributors. And if they give $60, they get a vote on what we do."

KDHX league responds

League of Volunteer Enthusiasts of KDHX formed amidst its turmoil and has met regularly in search of solutions to save the station. On the eve of April Fool's Day, LOVE-KDHX spokesperson Roy Kasten was preparing for a candlelight vigil on Washington Avenue in front of KDHX.

"First of all, our vigil is not a wake," said Kasten. "It's all about hope and love by the St. Louis community. The story of KDHX is far from over."

Kasten addressed some of the questions posed by community radio fans in Columbia. He said the wisdom of moving to the Grand Center headquarters was not in question until a KDHX capital campaign floundered in 2012-2014.

KDHX was damaged severely by the summary terminations of multiple volunteer DJs with loyal followers and popular shows. Some of those DJs signed a "no confidence" letter aimed at executive director Kelly Wells.

Kasten said the crisis at KDHX is a failure of its past leadership and its board of directors, who've failed to be open with radio volunteers and supporters.

"Kelly Wells and the board won't speak to us or the press about how we got here and where KDHX is going," said Kasten. "They won't entertain our proposals to save the station and to reorganize its administration."

Kasten may feel the story of KDHX is far from over, but the proverbial "it ain't over 'til the fat lady sings" may be misguided with the station's current leadership and board president, Gary Pierson, heading to court with their bankruptcy request later in April.

Part of his proposal includes KDHX surviving as a streaming presence on the internet, while the new Christian radio ownership would bring its religious-oriented content to the St. Louis airwaves.

Streaming isn't radio

Veterans of both KDHX and KOPN in Columbia are adamant that streaming is not community radio. And what veteran DJs would be willing to bring their on-air talents to a streaming service?

Old KDHX radio station building. Critics questioned the wisdom of moving from this building to the more expensive Grand Center headquarters. **Photo via Wikimedia Commons**

KOPN Board Treasurer Linda Day said she's overjoyed that KOPN is not facing the predicament of KDHX. There's money in the bank. However, she said community radio is always a bumpy road with potholes up ahead.

"One thing we're facing is cuts in government subsidies at all levels," said Day. "But we're pretty confident that our contributors are more than ready to pick up the slack when cuts come down on us."

Of more serious concern to Day, Herrmann and Walsh is the new FCC Chief Brendan Carr and his intention to bring President Donald Trump's war on diversity, equity and inclusion to bear on all forms of media.

The FCC has the power to renew licenses and to examine whether licenses are living up to the public interest, said Day. She said the FCC under Carr could have a very different definition of public service that doesn't include DEI.

"Community radio is all about DEI," said Day. "We're not going to give up that mission. Our commitment to diversity and diverse programing is what has made KOPN work so well over the years."

Don Corrigan is former editor of the Webster-Kirkwood Times and emeritus professor at Webster College.

St. Louis correspondent Jim Salter, right, on assignment Thursday, April 14, 2016 with John Morris, founder of Bass Pro Shops in Ridgedale, Mo. **Photo by Jeff Roberson**

AP's last correspondent in St. Louis takes buyout, cutting back on wire service's continuous presence since before Civil War

By Terry Ganey

An important cog in the news-making machinery of St. Louis has quietly slipped out of service with the departure of veteran Associated Press Correspondent Jim Salter.

For 31 years, Salter supplied the global wire service with a steady diet of hard news, sports and features from eastern Missouri. In 2011 he was part of a team that covered the Joplin tornado that killed 161 people, and three years later he was on the scene of riots in Ferguson following the police shooting of Michael Brown. He's covered more than 70 executions.

At the beginning of this year, Salter, 65, accepted a buyout from the AP. He was part of an 8 percent reduction in staff — achieved through buyouts, job eliminations and layoffs — that the wire service had announced in November. The timing worked out for Salter since he had planned to retire.

The AP has had a correspondent in St. Louis since before the Civil War. But now it appears Salter will be the last.

"I don't know if they're ever going to replace me," Salter said in a recent telephone interview. "I don't know what their broad plans are." Currently the AP has a staff photographer in St. Louis, as well as a reporter who specializes in environmental coverage. But there has been no successor named to replace Salter to cover the news, and the AP has not committed to do so.

Nicole Meir, media relations manager for The Associated Press, said by email "AP continues to have journalists based in St. Louis and remains deeply committed to its 50-state U.S. footprint."

Asked the specific question as to whether the correspondent would be replaced, Meir replied, "I'll direct you to my previous statement."

'Thrown into the fire'

Salter grew up in Hannibal, Missouri and earned a degree in mass communications in 1982 from Northeast Missouri State University, now Truman State University, in Kirksville. In the years that followed, he gained broad journalism experience at the Hannibal Courier Post covering city hall, county government, police agencies, schools and local sports.

"To me it was a real blessing to be at a place like that because you learn so much about everything," Salter said. "You're just kind of thrown into the fire."

In 1993, Salter successfully applied for a job with The Associated Press and was assigned to its St. Louis office. There were six full-time journalists working out of a fourth-floor office in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch building downtown.

A correspondent, three reporters, a full-

time sports reporter and a photographer fed the wires a steady stream of breaking news, crime, traffic fatalities, government stories, features and sports. Hundreds of AP member newspapers and broadcast stations shared all kinds of news in an information network that stitched the world together.

At that time, the AP was financed by its member newspapers that paid dues based upon circulation. But when the Internet arrived, newspaper revenue suffered, and AP's fortunes diminished.

"When the Internet really started hammering the newspaper industry, that was about the time the newspapers started really seeing the monster dot-coms taking away all the 'want' ads," Salter said. "It all started to damage the newspapers and that affected our 'bottom line' because newspapers were still a big part of the bottom line then."

By 2008, the St. Louis full-time staff was reduced from six to four, and in the years that followed, whenever a staff member retired or took another job, there was no replacement. By 2016, Salter was the only full time AP reporter in St. Louis. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March 2020, he was assigned to work out of his home in O'Fallon, Missouri, which remained his base until he accepted the buyout.

Now, the AP has Jeff Roberson as a full-time photographer based in St. Louis as well as Mike Phillis, who is part of the AP's climate team focusing on water issues. In October 2022 when a student and teacher were killed by a gunman who entered the Central Visual Performing Arts High School in St. Louis, Phillis helped with that coverage. "The school shooting was one of the few instances when we pulled him in," Salter said. Otherwise, Phillis sticks to covering the environment.

'Unflappable team player'

Reflecting on his career, Salter said covering the unrest in Ferguson following the police shooting of Brown was his biggest assignment. There were 15 days of rioting following Brown's death on Aug. 10, 2014, followed by eight days of protests in November after Darren Wilson, the police officer who shot Brown, was not indicted.

"It just resonated so much across the country," Salter said. "It was more than just a case of a police officer shooting a young black man. It brought out all these issues about how black people were treated by the courts and by some police departments." Ferguson was the national story the AP is best equipped to cover.

"If it's not major breaking news or high-end enterprise, we don't do it," Salter said.

In recent years, the wire service has converted nearly all coverage into a system in which stories are edited by national editors spread across the country.

Missouri is one of seven states in the Midwest region with Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa and Kansas. An editor based in Minneapolis works with reporters in the region and together daily stories or enterprise projects are generated.

"It's a combination of a reporter coming up with a story idea and working with an editor," Salter said. "It's a very collaborative system."

As far as the state of Missouri coverage goes, the AP has a photographer and two print reporters in Kansas City, one of whom covers sports, as well as two reporters in the state capital of Jefferson City. There's a videographer based in St. Joseph, Missouri as well as the two journalists still based in St. Louis.

At the time of Salter's departure, his soon-to-be former colleagues assembled for a virtual retirement farewell through a Zoom call. Reporters who had worked with him said he was "an unflappable team player" and someone who can "jump in and do the news and coach others along the way."

"You're going to leave a big hole in the AP when you're not here," said David Lieb, the Jefferson City correspondent. "We're going to miss having you around."

Shift to Digitalization

There was a time when having an AP franchise was a ticket to newspaper circulation success. The Post-Dispatch once boasted at the top of its front page "the only evening newspaper in St. Louis with the Associated Press news service." The print edition of the newspaper still heavily relies on the AP for national and international news and sports.

But other newspaper companies have decided to publish without the AP. Last year two large newspaper chains, the Gannett Co., publisher of USA Today, and McClatchy, publisher of the Kansas City Star and the Belleville News-Democrat, dropped the AP service.

According to David Bauder, the AP's national media writer, newspaper fees now constitute just over 10 percent of its annual income. The AP no longer makes the claim that it's the world's largest newsgathering organization and does not reveal the size of its staff, Bauder reported.

Still, according to a recent wire service news release, the AP remains the only news organization to report from across the country with journalists based in every state.

"The Associated Press has been a bedrock of accurate, nonpartisan journalism for the better part of two centuries," said Julie Pace, AP senior vice president and executive editor. "We remain deeply committed to our 50-state U.S. footprint, at a time when state and local news outlets are under increasing pressure yet the need for fact-based news has never been greater."

The AP and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation have recently announced an expanded collaboration to strengthen the AP's U.S. news report and coverage of state and local news. The collaboration emphasizes the delivery of news to digital audiences.

"There's a movement to write for more web use," Salter said. "Our biggest customers are now Google and Yahoo."

The shift to more digital reporting means using more photos and video web-friendly stories. "The new hires going forward will be more video folks than print folks," Salter said. "I think it's an important point to make that the video hires are video journalists, not camera shooters. They are very talented."

Court coverage – from 'The Front Page' to the internet

By Ted Gest

In the fast-paced media environment of 2025, how has news coverage of the courts evolved since the classic 1974 portrayal of "The Front Page"? The Ben Hecht-Charles MacArthur dramedy was set in the 1920s press room of Chicago's criminal courts building where cigar-chomping, card-playing reporters phoned in sensational stories about local crime cases.

Things were not so different in the 1970s. As a St. Louis Post-Dispatch reporter just out of journalism school, I told my editors that I was interested in covering legal issues.

In practice, this meant working as a "rewrite" person, putting together stories called in by two men who covered often-complex cases from the federal and local courts. It was a terrible system in the days before the internet, with much of the nuance lost in the retelling.

One Friday afternoon, I was excited to get an assignment taking over for our federal court reporter and watching the end of that week's testimony in a major ongoing trial. Peering into the courtroom, I was surprised that he was nowhere in sight.

I made my way to the press room, a smaller version of the one in the "Front Page," where I found reporters for the Post-Dispatch, the old Globe-Democrat and several federal marshals partying with drinks from a liquor cabinet.

After joining the festivities for a while, I asked the Post-Dispatch reporter, a grizzled veteran named Ed James, what we should do to cover the big trial? No problem, he said. We'll ask the judge.

Sure enough, we went down the hall to the chambers of U.S. District Judge Roy Harper, who recounted some of that afternoon's testimony. That was the basis of the next day's story.

As poor as our journalism was that day, it was nothing compared to what happened on April 14, 1970.

As it happened almost daily, the city editor transferred me a call from James to hear his version of that day's events. He said he had a good story. A judge on his beat had been named to the Supreme Court.

I figured that he must be joking. Most of his offerings were barely worth a few paragraphs, a format we called a "five head" for the headline's type size.

This story turned out to be a shocker. President Richard Nixon that day nominated Judge Harry Blackmun of the St. Louis-based U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit to the high court after the Senate had rejected two prior nominees.

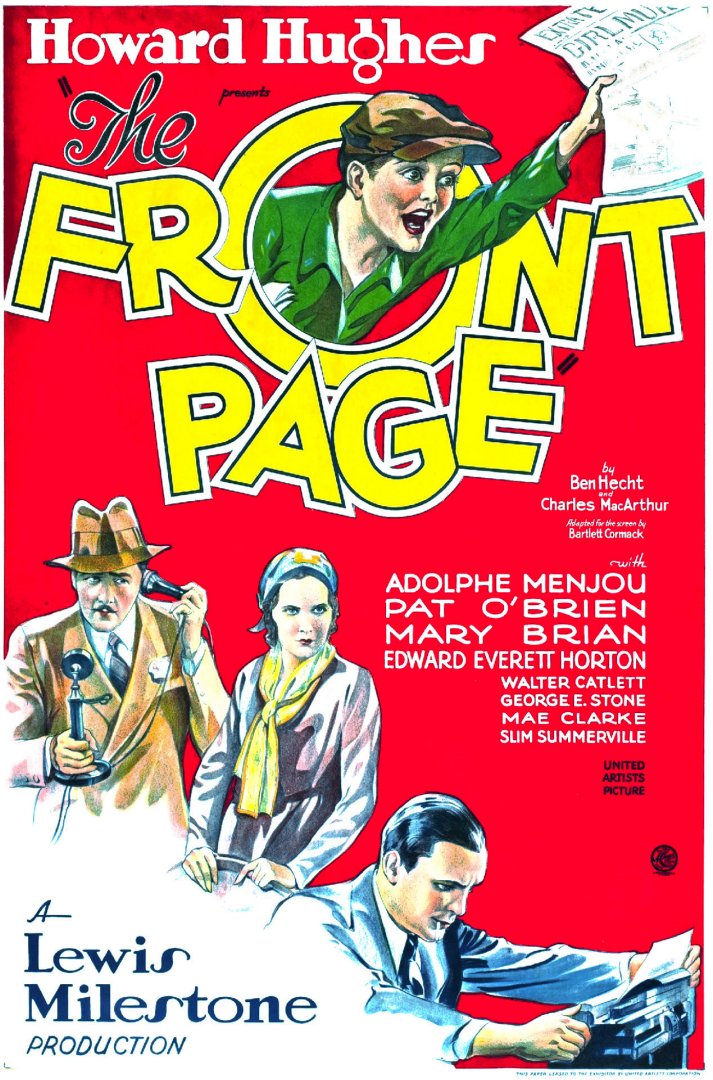
Blackmun was based in Minnesota but was in St. Louis that day to hear arguments in cases. James spoke to him but was able to get only a dull statement that Blackmun was pleased to be appointed. We completely failed to produce a good story that we could have had exclusively.

I was only 23 years old, but I approached the city editor and complained about the obvious: this was a terrible way to cover a national story. Could I take over the court beat and do a much better job?

It took two years. James retired and I started covering federal courts and law enforcement on May 1, 1972, coincidentally the day long-time FBI director J. Edgar Hoover died. My first story was to get the reaction of local agents, who could only praise their controversial boss.

To avoid a repetition of the Blackmun debacle, I made it my business to get to know every judge, prosecutor and other major player in the St. Louis justice system.

It paid off when judges and lawyers tipped me off to good stories, ones a reporter could get only by prowling the courthouse.



Poster for the American comedy film The Front Page (1931).
Photo via Wikimedia Commons

A half century later, media coverage of the courts nationwide is a mixed picture. Many major newspapers still employ reporters, like me in the 1970s, to spend their days exploring the nooks and crannies of courthouses, coming up with compelling stories about fascinating criminal cases and multimillion dollar civil disputes.

In other areas, local journalism has eroded as newspapers have cut back their staff or shut down entirely. (Most court coverage has been rooted in print journalism, as broadcasters typically cover only major cases, in large part because courtroom cameras remain limited.)

Newspapers forced to trim their staff often have combined the police and court beats, meaning that courts get short shrift, with stories only about the filings of new cases or the verdicts in old ones.

Sean O'Sullivan is president of the Conference of Court Public Information Officers, whose members answer questions from the media.

He said court reporters these days "are not working at the same level they did previously. Years ago, you may have had a reporter who used to cover courts exclusively and exhaustively. They would regularly dig into cases and attend trials from start to finish. They would generally know the law and the court system.

"Now it is more typical that courts are just one among many beats a reporter covers, or the reporter is simply general assignment, and they are focused on getting the result rather than the trial process. And many times, when the reporter comes to cover a court event it may be the first time they set foot in the courthouse."

Another perspective on how things have changed came from Peter

Benitez, a former St. Louisan who served as New York City's criminal justice coordinator in the 1980s and later as a trial judge. Benitez said good reporting used to be done "by journalists who were specifically assigned to a courthouse beat. In order to develop contacts and get a story, they sought to be honest and accurate about their reporting. Also, they wanted to educate their readers about criminal justice matters, not just write a newspaper story, as they knew that the general public was not particularly knowledgeable about the law or policing.

"Now I think criminal justice reporting has changed. It is not as accurate or thorough as it used to be. Often it is simply superficial. The same can be said for reporting on all court related matters." Because of cutbacks in newsroom staffing, he said, "those who cover the courts are not dedicated to that area of journalism. They are just pulled from the staff of reporters for that story and then go to some other story. Accordingly, they don't have the contacts court-focused journalists used to have and don't have the time nor interest in really getting into a particular issue."

Jesse Rutledge, the vice president of public affairs at the National Center for State Courts, believes that the decline is particularly apparent in "medium-sized" areas, with large newspapers continuing their extensive coverage and small-town media closely tracking local cases.

One partial replacement for vanishing local court reporters is Courthouse News Service, which hires reporters in major cities to report for what it immodestly calls itself "probably the best news site in the world."

Editor Bill Girdner said that formerly robust local court reporting ranks have been "decimated" as many economically-strained newspapers have largely eliminated full-time court beats.

This means the news media miss details of many legal proceedings and fail to give the public much understanding of how the courts are operating in their localities.

The Berkeley Judicial Institute at the University of California offers a wide range of programs, including many about media, to promote judicial ethics and independence. Its director, former federal judge Jeremy Fogel, believes that a general "lack of understanding of the functions of courts" has helped produce a "decline in public trust and confidence" in the judicial system.

Big cases still get plenty of coverage; the New York Times boasted that it had 10 reporters covering aspects of Donald Trump's so-called hush money case.

The result of the concentration on high-profile cases: Americans get a skewed impression of what happens in courts. Based on what appears on television news programs or newspaper front pages, it might seem that courts handle only grisly murder cases or multi-million dollar verdicts in personal injury cases.

In reality, the vast majority of cases are resolved by plea bargains or settlements, many of which can be just as newsworthy but take some digging by reporters to tell the whole story.

As skimpy as court reporting has become in many U.S. cities, there are several countervailing factors that have helped sustain a steady diet of stories.

The main one is the growth of the internet, which allows reporters to see court decisions at their newsroom desks and rarely enter the court building.

The Missouri court system, for example, offers a website called case.net, where the public can check on the status of individual cases.

The main state court in St. Louis, the 22nd Judicial Circuit Court, also has its own website, which lists all of the court's judges and provides information on common questions, such as how jury service works and how to file a divorce case.

There also is a growth of specialized websites such as Courthouse News Service, Bloomberg Law, Law360 and others, although they cater mainly to lawyers and consumers who do online searches that lead them to these sites.

A new website called State Court Report, sponsored by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University law school, covers "legal news, trends, and cutting-edge scholarship … from a nationwide network of academics, journalists, judges, and practitioners with diverse perspectives and expertise."

Another development that helps fill the gap in news coverage is that more courts and legal agencies now have public relations employees who provide reporters with summaries of court cases and tips on stories.

In St. Louis, for example, two former Post-Dispatch court reporters fill such jobs: Joel Currier at the St. Louis Circuit Court and Robert Patrick at the U.S. Attorney's Office, which handles all Justice Department criminal and civil cases.

While the Post-Dispatch still has a full-time court reporter, Katie Kull, holding the equivalent of my old job, she is able to get news of court decisions online and from the public relations representatives, neither of which was possible back in the 1970s and before. Another reporter tracks courts in St. Louis County.

Kull said she has some time to also do "enterprise" stories that are not based on the daily news flow of cases.

For example, last summer she traveled with a photographer to California to tell the story of Christopher Dunn, a St. Louis man who spent 34 years in prison after being wrongfully convicted of murder.

Learning opportunities for court reporters are available but sporadic. The National Judicial College in Reno, Nevada, formerly operated a National Center for Courts and Media, which sponsored periodic programs for legal journalists, but the center closed more than a decade ago when its foundation funding ran out.

Since 2006, Loyola Marymount University Law School in Los Angeles has run a yearly four-day course for about 30 legal journalists, and some local courts and bar associations have similar programs. The Loyola course includes a wide range of legal subjects beyond coverage of courts.

Fogel's Berkeley Judicial Institute offers online programs on court and media issues, in large part to encourage judges to talk to reporters, which many judges are reluctant to do for fear of violating judicial ethics rules.

While it would be improper for a judge to disclose details of pending cases that are not available to the public in court filings, it is permissible for judges to give journalists off-the-record explanations of how the legal process works, and some local reporters take advantage of that.

Barbara Peck, who teaches judges at the National Judicial College, tells them that "the reporters coming into a courtroom today are likely not a traditional beat reporter covering the courts. Even 20 years ago, judges would see the same reporters, who were well-versed in court procedure and terminology, on a regular basis. But today, it may be a different reporter even through the course of a single trial and the media who are there may not be attached to a major media outlet."

Peck advises judges in cases covered by the media "slow down, explain what is happening in open court, use decorum orders to set expectations related to coverage, write orders in plain English and use a spokesperson or PIO to help explain the different stages of a court procedure, like the difference in a first-appearance, arraignment and status hearing. Everyone benefits when the media coverage is accurate."

Some court systems are taking steps to increase public understanding of their operations without depending on the media. Rutledge of the National Center for State Courts cites an Indiana "Appeals on Wheels" program in which judges hear arguments on cases at colleges and schools and later answer questions from the audience about how the judiciary works.

With thorough court reporting at the regional and local levels sparse or nonexistent what is the public missing when journalists rarely set foot in courthouses?

The main thing is personal contact with judges, court officials and lawyers, which can help them explain to their audiences how the legal

Continued on next page

system really works.

Because they do not usually produce dramatic stories about cases, most journalists do not report on a major development in recent decades, the growth of "problem solving" courts that specialize in hearing cases involving categories of defendants such as drug addicts and veterans.

Even less attention is paid to municipal courts, where the average citizen is most likely to appear to respond to driving and housing violations, among other common infractions.

It took the nationally publicized killing of teenager Michael Brown in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson in 2014 to prompt a U.S. Justice Department report in 2015 that found unconstitutional practices, conflicts of interest and other illegal conduct involving the city's court system and police.

Between 2010 and 2014, Ferguson issued 90,000 citations and summonses, only 21,000 involving residents of the city.

While Ferguson ended up with plenty of public attention, the same cannot be said for many local courts around the nation.

Despite the clear decline in news media court coverage overall, there are still examples of excellent stories. One such effort appeared in CT Insider, a website featuring material from 23 daily and weekly newspapers in the Hearst Connecticut Media Group.

In February, the Insider published an exhaustive look at long delays in the disposition of criminal cases in the state that "traumatize and frustrate many victims and can weaken the prosecution's case." The website spent over 20 hours observing court proceedings on six separate occasions, watching case after case being continued to later dates. Several cases had been in court more than 30 times.

People interested in the courts can sometimes find such illuminating coverage, but local journalism exploring the nuts and bolts about how the judiciary really operates remains something of a hit-and-miss enterprise across the nation.

Pistor, former Post-Dispatch reporter, tried to reuse the city hall pressroom before his unexpected death

By Ted Gest

Before former *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reporter Nick Pistor died of a sudden illness on April 8 at the age of 43, he was in a battle with St. Louis officials about temporarily regaining his old office space.

Pistor, a book author who covered city hall for the newspaper between 2011 and 2016, had planned to research a book about city government based partly on his experience. He reasoned that if the city provided free space to daily newspapers, it should afford that privilege to any legitimate journalist.

At the time of his death, Pistor had not received a substantive response from Mayor Tishaura Jones, who lost a bid for another term in an election the same day Pistor died.

Free space for the city's then-two daily newspapers goes back decades, says David Nathan, who covered city government for the *Globe-Democrat* from 1970 to 1974 and is now retired in Maryland.

Nathan recalls that when he first was assigned to the beat, he was given a desk in the outer office of A. J. Cervantes, mayor from 1965 to 1973.

He says this location was "in the middle of much of the action and a lot of private conversations. That was a great idea for a reporter seeking inside information but not a good idea for any Mayor not wanting newspapers to know everything.

"There was one other factor besides too much 'intimacy' that eventually led me to be banished to the first floor cubby. I clearly got too comfortable in the thick-carpeted Mayor's office and, on a couple of occasions after work hours, took off my shoes and walked around in my socks.

"That earned me a well-deserved reprimand directly from the Mayor, and, soon thereafter, I was dispatched to the Siberia of the tiny office on the ultra-busy first floor."

Nathan says he "looked forward to the solitude of the solo office where I thought I could concentrate on all my stories, that is, all the Pulitzer Prize winning scoops that I envisioned. But it turned out that 'intimacy' prevailed there as well. For starters, there was a paper-thin wall between my *Globe* office and the adjoining *Post-Dispatch* office, and you could normally hear every phone or in-person conversation.

"Second, the phone lines obviously were tangled and so you, in effect, had a throwback to the old party line phones of yore. On top of that, two of the *Post* reporters I competed against at city hall were hard of hearing and yelled much of the time."

(A parade of legendary *Post-Dispatch* reporters came through during Nathan's tenure, including Robert Christman, Lou Rose, Phil Sutin and Gerald Boyd, later managing editor of the *New York Times*.)

Nathan recalls that "a street preacher stationed himself on a folding chair right outside my office, waiting to make a few bucks (sometimes less than $5) conducting simple civil wedding ceremonies right in the hall next to my door. More than once, I left the office and immediately walked into the middle of a down-at-the-heels ceremony." (Pistor told GJR that impromptu weddings still happen near the *Post-Dispatch* office.)

Nathan says, "Because the office was in the first floor mainstream, besides a fairly steady hum of constituents and others entering the building, I dealt with people knocking on my door to ask where the preacher was, or the location of other offices. In order to concentrate, I decided to turn out the lights in my office and lock the door."

Returning to the modern Pistor era, Nathan says "that tiny, nondescript cubby would be the last place I would think someone would aspire to."

For his part, Pistor said he was so interested in a city hall perch that he would have paid rent. He told *St. Louis* magazine, "It looks like the *Post* has not paid rent for decades—and they're a for-profit company."

Pistor offered either to share the current *Post-Dispatch* space or occupy the old *Globe-Democrat* office, which now is used to store Christmas decorations. He said he would have offered any space he might have been given "to anyone who's doing journalism."

Outgoing Mayor Jones referred Pistor's request for space to the city comptroller, who makes decisions on city hall offices. Pistor had hoped to get a better response from Alderwoman Cara Spencer, who won the mayoral election.

Pistor left the *Post-Dispatch* to become a full-time author and consultant for CBS's "48 Hours." His most recent project took him to New Mexico, where he investigated the deaths of actor Gene Hackman and his wife for CBS. His most recent book, "Shooting Lincoln," was released by Hachette in September 2017.

During his time at the newspaper, Pistor was known for uncovering scandals as well as the truth that those in power tried to shield, said former *Post-Dispatch* reporter Christine Byers. His investigation into St. Louis Recorder of Deeds Sharon Carpenter led to her resignation.

In 2010, Pistor noticed faint stains on the Gateway Arch. His investigation established that the national monument was corroding and suffered from lax maintenance.

Robert Duffy's journalism: Deeply informed, delightfully whimsical

By Margaret Wolf Freivogel

This eulogy was delivered March 30 at Robert W. Duffy's memorial service at Graham Chapel at Washington University before about 500 friends and colleagues.

What made Bob Duffy such a consequential journalist? Why does his loss resonate so widely — from colleagues to preservationists, to visual artists, to musicians and beyond?

You'll find some answers in this reading from the Old Testament — that is, Robert W. Duffy's testament on the destruction of Old St. Louis buildings. This chapter is from the mid 1990s, when the Mercantile Bank razed the Ambassador Theater.

Bobby wrote:

"Taking unseemly delight in the misfortune of others is an unattractive human response. Nevertheless, Schadenfreude is so exhilarating that some of us go out of our way to experience it. This writer, for example.

"Several times over the last couple months I adjusted the route of my Friday check-depositing journey downtown for the specific purpose of watching and glorying in the amount of trouble one old building could create for a great bank.

"Usually, in St. Louis anyway, it's easy to destroy old buildings… The Ambassador resisted, however, and resisted with the kind of muscle that often is not associated with the old, the worn out, the washed up…

"The razing took months longer than anyone had planned. Schadenfreude, or in simple English, ha ha."

Why was Bobby such a consequential journalist? Because he wrote vividly about what made events significant. The Ambassador Theater was just one building, but its destruction was part of a pattern, a failure of St. Louisans to apprehend our architectural legacy. And architecture was part of a constellation of arts and culture – assets we routinely squander. As much as the economy or politics, these assets need to be leveraged to create a vibrant future for St. Louis. Bobby understood that. And because he wrote about it for decades, we could understand it, too.

Bobby wrote with confidence, but not arrogance. Instead, it was like he was welcoming you to come along for a ride around town. It would be a bike ride, of course, with witty commentary on the latest developments and detours into the mysteries of human nature.

Over more than three decades at the Post-Dispatch, Bobby held many titles but his focus always centered on the creative legacy and potential of St. Louis. And his voice always managed to sound both deeply informed and delightfully whimsical.

When Stan Musial died, Bobby recalled the night in 1994 when Stan the Man met the Emperor of Japan during a Cardinals game at Busch Stadium. In a weird juxtaposition, the television in the luxury box next door was blaring coverage of OJ Simpson's slow-motion chase in a white Bronco.

But Musial was not going to let the news ruin the game. Unexpectedly, he rose from his seat and approached the emperor. Bobby narrated the scene this way:

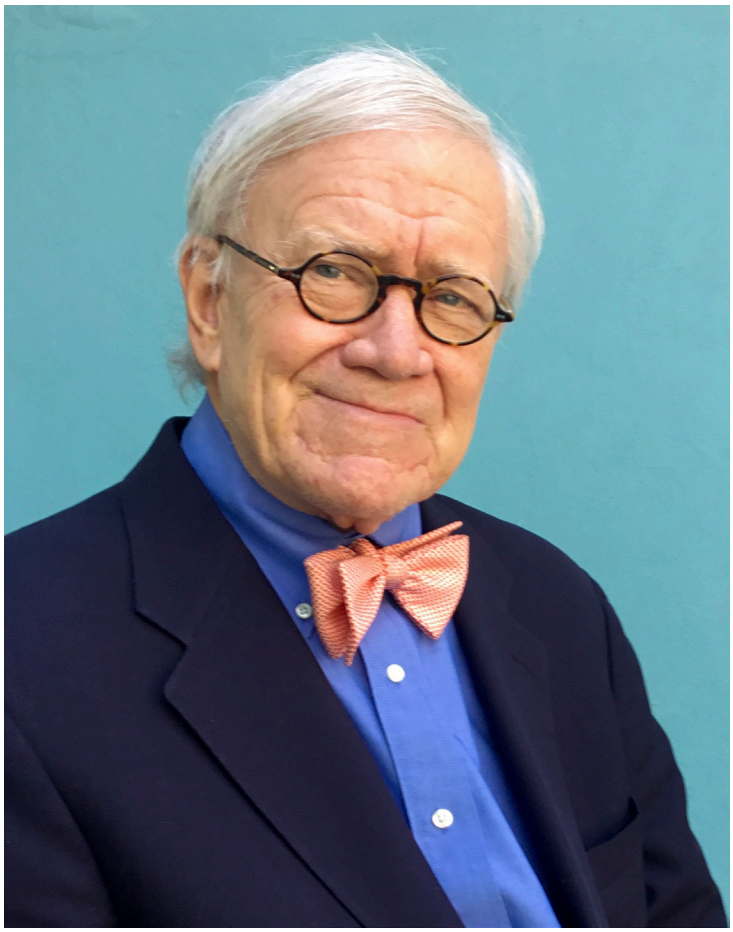
"Want to see how I hit 'em? Musial said…

"The emperor's usually unreadable face betrayed bewilderment.

"...Musial picked up an air bat, and displayed his trademark corkscrew stance…

"The retinue was stunned. The American hosts…froze…But after a moment in which jitters were palpable, the current monarch of the Chrysanthemum Throne looked into the eyes of the great American hero, and smiled."

"It was a quiet and transcendent minute, a meeting of cultures,



an encounter of two formidable characters, … a flicker of grace to pass almost unnoticed, sponged as it was into the fractious history of the 20th-century…"

Of course, this moment WAS noticed because Bobby noticed it.

Bobby's boldest venture at the Post-Dispatch was an effort to buy it. Those of us who concocted this employee ownership proposal didn't know that the digital revolution was about to destroy the business model of all newspapers. In truth, we didn't know much about business. We were surprised to learn that mezzanine was a term that could apply to loans, not just theater seats.

When Lee Enterprises prevailed in the bidding, we were heartbroken – but not nearly as heartbroken as we would have been had we succeeded. Within months, it was clear that newspapers everywhere were facing an existential threat, and Lee had already started to shrink the newsroom.

Bobby was among those who left but still cared deeply about the journalistic legacy of Joseph Pulitzer and the importance of local news. Somebody should do something, we said. And then we realized somebody was us.

Emboldened by our foray into employee ownership, a group of Post-Dispatch expats embarked on what would become Bobby's greatest journalistic adventure, the St. Louis Beacon. As one of the first online, nonprofit newsrooms in the country, the Beacon was a pioneer. Our goal was to combine the best values of Pulitzer journalism with the best potential of digital technology.

Three of us emerged as an informal leadership team to develop the concept — Bobby, Richard Weil and me. Our journalistic experience ran deep, but Bobby was the only one who knew anything about raising money, thanks to the year he spent working for Opera Theater.

For months, we met with prospective staff and supporters in coffee shops and restaurants. This is when I learned that wherever you might go, Bobby would run into three or four longtime friends. Most folks didn't yet understand that serious journalism could be done online, but they trusted Bobby and stepped forward to provide support.

In February of 2008, we launched the Beacon under the motto "news that matters." Our first big series was called "Race, Frankly." It was a yearlong effort to explore how race affects almost everything in St. Louis, yet we struggle to talk candidly across racial lines. Many of the Beacon's fine staff and supporters are with us today. That includes Marty (Martin Kaplan, Duffy's husband), whose business experience was invaluable.

As the Beacon's chief fund-raiser, Bobby brought pizzazz to the work. A yearly Beacon Festival gave supporters a chance to meet authors like Curtis Sittenfeld and to visit sites like the only surviving mound in the city of St. Louis built by the ancient Cahokia civilization.

Perhaps the most memorable fundraiser Bobby organized was a performance of Gilbert and Sullivan's "HMS Pinafore," starring the incomparable Christine Brewer and symphony conductor David Robertson. It was a magical evening, and the fun helped keep a very serious organization afloat.

After about five years, the Beacon was looking for ways to increase its impact. Meanwhile, St. Louis Public Radio was looking for ways to expand its news coverage. Leaders of both organizations quickly saw the advantages of merging, but it only happened because Bobby saved the process from several near-death experiences.

Writing in 2010, Bobby reflected on the Beacon and on what makes journalism valuable to the communities it serves. Events need to be considered in context, Bobby said. News "should be reported to you to reveal both history and consequences."

He concluded this way: "Together, innovation and a fundamental faith in tradition fuel our steady forward progress and fulfill our ambition to travel together with you, the reader, toward a richer understanding of the world we share, and a more complete recognition of our mutual obligations to take responsibility for its sustenance and for its improvement."

Thank you, Bobby, for a journalistic career that accomplished all that. Thanks for taking us all along for the ride.

Linda Greenhouse: Justice Alito's abortion decision was 'religious tract' with 'veneer of legal analysis'

By William H. Freivogel

Linda Greenhouse, the Pulitzer-Prize winning Supreme Court reporter, said in St. Louis recently that Justice Samuel Alito elaborately reinterpreted a 1990s precedent to "provide to a veneer of legal analysis on what is at its core a religious tract" overturning Roe v. Wade.

Greenhouse added that the "metastasized precedent" Justice Alito created is now being used by conservative judges to limit individual rights, such as those of transgender children and their parents by a Tennessee law — a contested bill ACLU brought to the Supreme Court.

Greenhouse made the comments at Washington University Law School Jan. 15 where she was the featured speaker at the 13th Annual First Amendment Celebration of the Gateway Journalism Review. The talk was co-sponsored by the WashU Law Public Interest Law & Policy Speaker Series and the Weidenbaum Center on Economy, Government & Public Policy.

Greenhouse said "the little-noticed but potentially significant doctrinal move that Alito made" in Dobbs vs. Jackson Women's Health Organization could be used by conservative judges to further limit rights of individual bodily autonomy.

In Dobbs, the Supreme Court struck down not only Roe v. Wade, decided in 1973, but also Planned Parenthood v. Casey in which the court reaffirmed Roe in 1992 with all five of the justices in the majority having been appointed by Republican presidents.

Greenhouse said, "Adherence to precedent is often described as an important, perhaps essential, element of judicial legitimacy. It reassures us that judges, and justices in particular, are 'doing law,' in Justice Elena Kagan's phrase, and not simply freelancing by enshrining their policy preferences in the pages of United States Reports. A rule of precedent provides stability and predictability: the law that meant one thing yesterday will mean the same thing tomorrow. It offers fairness: like things are treated alike."

But that doesn't mean that precedents are never overturned. They have been overturned more than 240 times, Greenhouse said. Brown v. Board in 1954 overturned Plessy's "separate but equal" doctrine and constitutional protection of gay marriage, through Obergefell v. Hodges, overturned another precedent in 2015.

Trump justices key to overturning Roe

In overturning Dobbs, "the role played by the three Trump-appointed justices… is too obvious to require elaboration," Greenhouse said. "Nonetheless, Justice Alito needed to say something in Dobbs other than that he finally had enough like-minded colleagues to accomplish his long-held goal."

The 1991 decision of Payne v. Tennessee set out a kind of checklist for when precedent was subject to being overturned.

Alito skipped over some points on the checklist that stood in his way, Greenhouse pointed out. For example, Payne said that a closely divided court was one indicator of a precedent that could be overturned, but Roe was decided 7-2.

Another factor on the Payne checklist was reliance. Alito maintained he was "unable to find reliance in the conventional sense" in Casey's acceptance of Roe as precedent. He dismissed Casey as "novel and intangible" and insufficiently "concrete."

The Casey ruling explained the reliance it found in Roe: "people have organized intimate relationships and made choices that define their views of themselves and their places in society in reliance on the availability of abortion in the event that contraception should fail."

Alito emphasized Payne's factors of consistency and workability and pointed out that many of the federal appeals courts disagreed on how to apply Casey's standard — the standard that voided abortion regulations if they imposed an "undue burden" on a woman's abortion decision.

Judges chosen for their willingness to overturn Roe

But Greenhouse pointed out that disagreements among the appeals courts resulted from "the steady stream of

Washington University Law School Dean Stefanie Lindquist, Professor Greg Magarian, Greenhouse, Freivogel, Professor Karen Tokarz.

Photos courtesy of Brian Munoz, St. Louis Public Radio

abortion obstacles that hostile legislatures were continually serving up to the federal courts.

"Alito's description of inconsistency and unworkability obscured the central fact that the circuits that resisted finding any burden to be 'undue' had been stacked with judges chosen for their expressed or assumed opposition to the abortion right," said Greenhouse. "The problem was neither Roe nor Casey. It was a revanchist judiciary, of which Samuel Alito himself is a star member."

Alito added to the Payne checklist "a consideration of his own devising," said Greenhouse — "the nature of the court's error."

Some precedents "are more damaging than others," Alito observed in Dobbs. He added that Roe and Casey were among the most damaging of all, "deeply damaging," in fact, for having "usurped the power to address a question of profound moral and social importance that the Constitution unequivocally leaves for the people."

Alito turned to a 1999 "right to die" case, Washington v. Glucksberg, in which the court unanimously decided that physician-assisted suicide was not one of the liberties protected by due process in the 14th Amendment.

Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, himself a staunch conservative, wrote in Glucksberg that due process "specially protects those fundamental rights and liberties which are, objectively, deeply rooted in this nation's history and tradition and implicit in the concept of ordered liberty."

Justices in the Glucksberg majority made clear in cases that followed that, "history and tradition guide this inquiry but do not set its outer boundaries," as former Associate Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote in the same-sex marriage ruling. Kennedy added that while the analysis in the Glucksberg ruling "may have been appropriate" in the specific context of that case, it was "inconsistent with the approach this court has used in discussing other fundamental rights, including marriage and intimacy."

History and tradition freezes rights in time

Alito agreed in Dobbs that some rights not mentioned specifically in the Constitution are protected by due process. But he said any such right must be "deeply rooted in this nation's history and tradition" and "implicit in the concept of ordered liberty."

As examples, he cited Loving v. Virginia's protection of interracial marriage and Griswold v. Connecticut's protection of contraception — even though those practices were not deeply rooted in the nation's history or tradition when they were recognized.

But the right to abortion, Alito declared, was "critically different from any other right that this court has held to fall within the Fourteenth Amendment's protection of 'liberty.'" Abortion was "fundamentally different" from the rights recognized in those cases, he wrote. "The existence of the rights at issue in (contraception and same-sex relations) … does not destroy a 'potential life,' but an abortion has that effect."

Greenhouse concludes, "It is here that Alito unmasks himself: the problem isn't history, tradition or the concept of 'ordered liberty.' It is the fetus."

The reliance on Glucksberg is like "placing a veneer of legal analysis on what is at its core a religious tract," she said.

Chief Judge Jeffrey Sutton applied the same construction of Glucksberg to his decision in 2023 upholding a Tennessee

From right to left Mike Wolff, Emily Rauh Pulitzer and JoAnne LaSala. Wolff is a former Missouri Supreme Court judge and Saint Louis University law school dean; Pulitzer is chair of the Pulitzer Arts Foundation and LaSala, chief financial officer of the Missouri Foundation for Health

law that prohibits medical treatment for minors "suffering from gender dysphoria" who seek hormonal treatments that can limit effects of puberty, like voice deepening or menstruation.

Sutton said the transgender teens and their families "never engage with, or explain how they meet, the 'crucial' historical inquiry to establish this right. ['crucial' from Glucksberg] There is, to repeat, no such history or tradition. Grounding new substantive due process rights in historically rooted customs is the only way to prevent life-tenured federal judges from seeing every heart-felt policy dispute as an emerging constitutional right."

Greenhouse pointed to the Sutton decision as significant, saying, "the use that an influential appellate judge made of the metastasized precedent foreshadows how Glucksberg will be used in the future."

Greenhouse pointed out that locking women's rights in history and tradition froze their freedoms in a time when women couldn't vote.

Supreme Court not corrupt

During her visit to Washington University Law School on Jan. 15, Linda Greenhouse made a number of interesting observations about the U.S. Supreme Court. The retired New York Times Supreme Court reporter, who still writes columns for the paper, made these comments during her discussions with the school's law faculty and in a question-and-answer session:

Even though some liberal audiences think the U.S. Supreme Court is "corrupt," it isn't. Justice Clarence Thomas' acceptance of gifts from Harlan Crowe isn't significantly different from Justice William J. Brennan Jr.'s, acceptance of gifts from wealthy Washington philanthropist Charles E. Smith. In each case the gifts were in six figures.

The most serious ethical issue on today's court is Justice Thomas' failure to recuse himself from cases involving the Jan. 6 riot, despite his wife's emails to the White House during the post-election period.

Chief Justice John Roberts thought he had written a perfectly balanced decision in the Trump immunity case this past spring and was genuinely surprised by the strong criticism he received.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh often sounds as though he is considering both sides of a legal argument, but almost always comes down on the conservative side.

The most interesting of the Trump appointees is Amy Coney Barrett, who asked tough questions of a lawyer representing Idaho in an abortion case and who joined with the chief justice and the three Democratically appointed justices in refusing to put off Trump's criminal sentencing.

The most fraught issue that might come up between the court and Trump might be Trump refusing to obey an order or opinion of the court.

Greenhouse once objected to journalists identifying justices and judges by the president who appointed them, but no longer does because of the White House's strict political vetting of judges before appointment results in a more partisan bench.

When Greenhouse was a young reporter covering the New York legislature and courts, she appreciated a veteran judge's willingness to take her into his chambers and explain a difficult point of law. Most judges won't do that.

Dean Hong Cheng, SIUC College of Arts and Media where GJR is published.

Audience.

«cont_id»*«gpb_id»**********«endorse»

«first» «last»
«address2»
«address»
«city», «st» «zip»