

# IDEAS

ROB ROBERTS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: RROBERTS@POSTMEDIA.COM  
 KEVIN CARIBRELL, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, FINANCIAL POST: KCARIBRELL@POSTMEDIA.COM  
 JOE HOOD, MANAGING EDITOR, FINANCIAL POST: JHOOD@POSTMEDIA.COM  
 CLARA JEROME, COLUMNIST EDITOR: CJEROME@POSTMEDIA.COM  
 ALAN DENWEL, NEWS EDITOR: ADENWEL@POSTMEDIA.COM  
 RON WARDEN, PRESENTATION EDITOR: RWARDEN@POSTMEDIA.COM  
 JO-ANNE MACDONALD, ASSOCIATE EDITOR: JMACDONALD@POSTMEDIA.COM  
 DEBRAH STOKES, ASSOCIATE EDITOR, DIGITAL: DSTOKES@POSTMEDIA.COM



As the digital disruption continues to affect the health of news outlets, Tony Loffreda writes it's vital to our democracy that something is done to ensure a free and independent press continues to operate.

## David versus Goliath

A battle for journalism fairness online

TONY LOFFREDA

It begins most days with a good espresso and my morning news. Pursuing various news outlets and reading articles online is part of my daily morning routine. Like many Canadians, I access most of my news these days online and, unlike many years ago, we get our news in real-time now, as it happens.

The internet has certainly become the place where Canadians consume most of their news, whether it be via traditional news outlets or the sites of digital giants like Facebook and Google. Because of this consumer shift from print to online news, some argue that the well-being of journalism is threatened by the prevalent spread of misinformation and disinformation. Indeed, recent polls have shown that almost half of Canadians question the accuracy and truth of the information they receive from news organizations. This is a troubling statistic.

Just over a year ago, Statistics Canada also reported that "the operating revenue of Canadian newspaper publishers declined to \$2.1 billion in 2020, down 21.9 per cent from 2018." This downward trend has been happening for several years already and the pandemic has aggravated the situation. More and more news outlets, including community-based newspapers, are shutting down. Nine major urban daily newspapers have stopped printing their Monday editions since October, in part because of lost ad revenues to tech giants.

It's no secret news organizations are struggling to keep up with industry shifts and to revamp their business model while remaining financially viable (without government intervention). As the United Nations reported last summer, "the major shift of advertising revenue to social media and search

engines over the past decade and the growth in the power of internet companies controlling advertising technology have further eroded the economic foundations for news media pluralism, facilitated media capture, weakened diversity in news content and made it more difficult for news providers to resist other pressures."

To help remedy this situation, the federal government tabled Bill C-18, the Online News Act, modelled on Australian legislation. Like Bill C-11, the Online Streaming Act, Bill C-18 has generated much interest among parliamentarians, news outlets, digital giants, and other concerned stakeholders, and both bills are currently before the Senate.

Bill C-18 seeks to establish a new framework to ensure fairness in the Canadian digital news marketplace and for independent local news businesses, including rural and remote news organizations, by ensuring that news media and journalists receive fair compensation.

### MORE AND MORE NEWS OUTLETS ... ARE SHUTTING DOWN.

In October, Abacus Data conducted a poll on C-18, commissioned by Google Canada, and found that "large majorities believe it is important that the legislation ensures eligible news outlets follow journalistic standards and ethics, that local news is protected and given the resources to continue to operate but they also want search engines like Google Search to continue to work and perform the way they do now."

Our colleagues in the House of Commons made several important amendments to the bill. A news outlet must be a "member of a recognized journalistic association and follows the code of ethics of a recognized journalistic association or has its own code of ethics whose standards of professional conduct require adherence to the recognized processes and principles of the journalism profession, including fairness, independence and rigour in reporting news and handling sources."

The House also amended the eligibility criteria to ensure that journalists who own or are a partner in the news business count toward the two-employee minimum eligibility requirement. This change is particularly important to smaller ethnic and rural "mom and pop" publishers.

Of course, like any piece of legislation, Bill C-18 is not a slam-dunk. On the one hand, publishers are calling for swift passage because online platforms are not adequately compensating them for the content journalists have created. On the other hand, digital giants strongly object on the premise that the regulatory framework does not properly account for the value they provide to publishers and journalists.

Regardless of where you land on the issue, there is no doubt that the digital disruption is a real problem for journalism in general and traditional news outlets, particularly local and ethnic newspapers with limited financial means and decreasing advertising dollars. Is the Online News Act the solution? It might very well be. The Senate will be seized with this issue during the coming session, and I know we will have great debates both in the chamber and in committee.

One thing is certain: something is needed to ensure we have a free and independent press that continues to seek the truth, that remains accurate in its reporting, and that upholds the principles of reliability and objectivity. We may take that for granted, but it is crucial to a well-functioning democracy in helping its citizens make informed decisions about important issues.

As the UN wrote, "if independent public interest media cannot survive — let alone thrive — disinformation will flourish, journalists will be further imperilled and societies' right to information will be undermined."

Special to Postmedia News  
 Tony Loffreda is a member of the standing Senate committee on banking, trade and the economy and the national finance committee. He was a vice-chairman and executive at RBC.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### What convoy was about

Re: Uneasy détente over Freedom Convoy endures for conservatives, Catherine Lévesque, Jan. 28

Melanie Paradis makes the extremely important point that gets lost on so many post-mortems on the trucker convoy: that the Freedom Convoy did not come out of nowhere. "It was the 'physical manifestation' of a growing range of frustrations that had been bubbling up in multiple areas of the country, she said, and were exacerbated by COVID-19 measures and mandates."

Many Canadians, myself and many friends and family included, already struggled with the exclusionary politics of Justin Trudeau since his election. With the overly restrictive COVID measures dictating what we could and couldn't do, we reached the breaking point. This is what the convoy was about. People were simply fed up. They felt they had no voice to air their frustrations. The truckers gave them a voice that they otherwise wouldn't have had.

That the truckers could not meet with Justin Trudeau was unfortunate. But it was clear from the start that he wouldn't meet with them. His name-calling and refusing to meet with them was unbecoming of a prime minister.

Unfortunately then, our frustration remains. At this point, all we can hope for is that we have an election soon.

Farrécia Maloney, Ottawa

### Childcare concerns

Re: Government monopoly in childcare is not progress, Matthew Lau, Jan. 25

Matthew Lau's synopsis of the new federal childcare program was spot on. The three provinces he referenced have each taken different approaches to implementation, but face the same challenge. There aren't enough qualified staff to keep all existing childcare centres running at full capacity, let alone to staff new spaces.

In Ontario, this has been a problem since the last attempt at a government monopoly on care: the introduction of the so-called full-day kindergarten program in public schools, or FDK. FDK created a mass migration of early childhood educators from licensed childcare centres into the public school system. Childcare centres have faced severe staffing shortages ever since.

FDK also created a two-tier system of care for children 3.8 to five years old. Those whose families can afford to send them to a licensed childcare centre for kindergarten get personalized care in a highly regulated environment, which includes a hot meal and two snacks. Children from families with lower incomes are forced into government-run FDK where they get shorter hours of care, larger group sizes, and are not protected by the Child Care and Early Years Act. They have to bring their own lunch. They may even have a lengthy school bus commute, because of govern-



Justin Trudeau

ment policies that incentivize the consolidation of more children into fewer public schools.

Soon after its introduction, families in government-run FDK who needed care for their children beyond the abbreviated schedule offered by public schools, were required to pay "wrap-around" fees so their children could start earlier and stay later. Often, these fees were close to what the family would have been paying for an extended day of care at their local childcare centre, over 1,000 of which closed in the first five years of the FDK rollout.

The current iteration of the federal childcare program is likely to produce a similar result across the country, including thousands of centre closures. Taxpayers and the families who use the program will wind up paying more and more for it, while all children will wind up getting less and less.

Andrea Hannan, executive director, Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario

### Wrecking ball syndrome

Re: Trudeau's amateurish government, Diane Francis, Jan. 25

Justin Trudeau excels at appointing people to significant positions who are infected by the terrible disease I call the "wrecking ball syndrome." There was the former governor general who mistakenly wanted to reinvent the governor general's job. Now it is Isabelle Hudon, appointed CEO of the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC), a Crown corporation providing venture capital and advisory services to small enterprises.

One of Hudon's first priorities at BDC was to hire McKinsey for \$5 million to remake BDC from scratch. What an egregious abuse and misuse of public funds. Just imagine how many entrepreneurs could have benefited from the \$5 million. Hudon also had her chauffeur flown twice from Montreal to Vancouver at taxpayers' expense. I guess taxis were not good enough. All of this is reprehensible behaviour by a CEO running a public institution. Hudon is another wrecking ball who should be shown the door.

William Kennedy, Kingston, Ont.

### Disciplining children

Re: Spanking is already 'banned' enough as it is, Chris Selley, Jan. 26 (online)

Chris Selley writes that "the marginal harm of spanking as circumscribed by the Supreme Court in 2004 ... isn't even the same universe as a child being taken away from his or her parents, however imperfect they are (within limits, of course)."

Parents ought to be able to raise their children as they see fit (within limits, of course). And those limits are appropriately defined in Section 43 of the Criminal Code. Many parents believe they have the responsibility to discipline their children, not out of anger, but out of a desire to protect and train them to be good citizens.

There is no evidence that spanking within the boundaries of Section 43 causes negative behaviour in children. The government can never replace parents in the life of a child and must not try to do so by legislating how children ought to be raised.

Daniel Zekveld, Ottawa