

THE ROUNDUP

BY AND FOR THE STUDENTS OF HALF HOLLOW HILLS HIGH SCHOOL WEST

STORY OF THE WEEK - JANUARY 27, 2017

A FREE PRESS...

Note from the Editor: The Roundup aims to bring nothing but accurate, relevant content to the students and staff of High School West in order to promote awareness and discussion on a variety of issues. We are proud to represent a wide spectrum of views and urge anyone with an opinion to share it with us. If you have an opinion to contribute, please email westroundup@gmail.com to join our team. This special issue of the Story of the Week is dedicated to all those who do not have their voices heard.

Printed media is woven into the very framework of our nation: the American Revolution itself was fueled by newspapers. Because of the unstable climate and regional divides between the colonies, print acted as a binding agent and a vehicle for advocacy as war broke out in 1775. According to David Ramsay, one of the first historians of the American Revolution, "in establishing American independence, the pen and press had merit equal to that of the sword." During the better half of the 1800s, newspapers began to grow in strength and number as technological advancements such as the telegraph and faster printing equipment in the 1840s helped to expand the presses of the nation as it experienced rapid economic and demographic growth.

However, by the 20th century, the press had split threefold, between profitable powerhouses of advocacy and muckraking, establishments of serious and objective news-gathering, and the ever-so-

criticized sensationalism. These are three very different styles of news we can still see today, and all have coexisted in some form. While sensationalism (or, the use of exciting stories at the expense of accuracy in order to provoke public interest) is readily available more than ever due to the emergence of the internet, we cannot forget that there are plenty of reputable sources available as well, one simply needs to know how to be an educated consumer.

When it comes to journalism of the digital age, there is no larger scam than that of fake news: which, extraordinarily enough, can generate hundreds of thousands of clicks on a given day. Fake news sites are as easy to create and profitable as ever, as Facebook and Twitter shares generate an infinite web of clicks (and subsequent revenue). Not one ethical reporter contributes to the creation of a faux news website, just as no ethical businessperson contributes to the creation of a business scam. It is merely a way to generate easy money from advertising revenue from the comfort of your own home -- and the public eye must learn to differentiate these schemes from the real reporters of today.

There is no better example of modern sensationalism than the entertainment website BuzzFeed. Countless have criticized the site for publishing unconfirmed documents, yet BuzzFeed never alleged that the information in the dossier was correct; it simply published the documents that our intelligence agencies thought was important enough that members of Congress as well as President Obama and then President-elect Trump needed to see

them. The courage and perseverance of our media makes America strong, and we cannot back down in fear.

It is of utmost importance for individuals to have access to information, especially in a democracy. In recent memory, sites like WikiLeaks and figures like Edward Snowden have delivered information typically barred from the public. While many criticize such roles for leaking confidential information, figures like Edward Snowden should be revered for exposing NSA spying both domestically and internationally. In essence, Snowden used the same principle that journalism is built on: illuminating the truth for the benefit of the masses.

In fact, it is absolutely no surprise that the first war President Donald J. Trump has declared is the war on the media. He spent the first four days of his presidency in a raging battle with the news media over crowd sizes and has told political allies that the news media is his best foil because his supporters don't trust mainstream outlets. Yet, he chats with network executives, behind the scenes, trying to shape his coverage while obsessing over ratings. "They are among the most dishonest human beings on Earth," he said last Saturday during a CIA meeting on his first full day on the job, referring to press reporters. "We had a massive field of people. You saw them. Packed. I get up this morning, I turn on one of the networks, and they show an empty field."

These accusations could not be further from the truth.

The essence of journalism is to bring truth to light - which will only get tougher if our President



For a Free People

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bullies, belittles reporters and bars them from doing their job. This past June, while still campaigning extensively for the Republican party nominee position, Trump and his staff made the decision to revoke The Washington Post's press credentials after he did not agree with the wording of an article. That is, The Washington Post was effectively not allowed access into what would otherwise be accessible to the press. Executive Editor Martin Baron responded soon after via Twitter with, "Donald Trump's decision to revoke The Washington Post's press credentials is nothing less than a repudiation of the role of a free and independent press. When coverage doesn't correspond to what the candidate wants it to be, then a news organization is banished ... The Post will continue to cover Donald Trump as it has all along - honorably, honestly, accurately, energetically, and unflinchingly. We're proud of our coverage, and we're going to keep at it."

This is not the first time, nor the last, that Donald Trump has revoked credentials from news outlets. Deemed the "blacklist," the list includes an assortment of digital outlets, the largest Spanish-language broadcaster in the country, a premiere local newspaper and -- now, with The Post -- one of the most prestigious news organizations in the world. Officials must disregard personal beef with news outlets in order to establish a true free press. If a president does not agree with the wording of a headline, he or she should not blockade reporters from information in any way. In fact, journalists are what keeps the White House honest.

While we have seen various degrees of defiance between the media and the Oval Office, no president in history has been this vocal about his dissatisfaction. Additionally, the new administration has already begun shuffling the media power in the White House, as the traditional order of questions taken from different news outlets has shifted dramatically. While Lifestyette.com and the New York Post are beginning news briefings, the traditional starter, The Associated Press, has taken a back seat. Trump's chief strategist came from Breitbart News, a right-wing, nationalist website previously run by White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon. "I want you to quote this," Mr. Bannon said during a meeting Wednesday. "The media here is the opposition party. They don't understand this country."

The purpose of the press has always been to combat ignorance, serve as a platform for liberty and promote positive change. "The media should be embarrassed and humiliated and keep its mouth shut and just listen for a while," added Bannon during a phone call with the New York Times. But how can a service to inform the people simply 'stay quiet'? For a party with roots in the Constitution, there is surely no way that the founding fathers would agree. We must not stay quiet: instead, we must focus on illuminating the world with truth. We must combat opposition to the ability to speak freely and without persecution.

We, as a people, deserve that much.

