

Opinion: Keep strong, independent media alive

By Kathryn Reed

The Fourth Estate. That has long been the media's role. We are there to ask the tough and unpopular questions. We are there to report the answers.



What happens if no one asks those questions?

Now in my third decade as a professional journalist, I have seen plenty of changes through the years. Two things I embrace – the choice of news outlets beyond the three networks I grew up with and the ability to get real-time news instead of the three-hour tape delay TV news broadcast.

In some ways, those are also the two things that bother me the most about the changes in the news industry, too. Choice is great – but at what cost? With so many niche publications – online, print, TV – many people are not getting a breadth of news. It's focused, targeted – almost written just for them. I worry if people don't read things beyond what they are interested in, as well as things they disagree with, that we will have an ill informed society. And what happens when those people go to the ballot box?

Not every story is fun to read. Trust me, they aren't fun to report or write either.

If I could just write what I wanted, it would be food, outdoors and travel stories. But as much as I need to write

about other things, I firmly believe we need to be reading all the other things.

Real-time news is great. But accuracy should come before being the first to report something. Old-school? Perhaps. But it's what is so often missing with the 24-hour news cycle. We equate "best" with being "first" – not "best" with having the "best" story.

It's getting harder for news outlets of any kind to deliver in-depth stories. That 24-hour cycle is part of the problem. The media is in a bit of a game of trying to keep up with the Joneses. It's not serving the public well.

The other problem is the lack of revenue media has. Newspapers blew it when they gave away their content for free on the Internet. It made entities like *Lake Tahoe News* unable to charge for content. It's just not mainstream to do so or something the public has an appetite for.

But it takes money for all media outlets to survive. In-depth stories like the two-part series on drugs on the South Shore that will run on *Lake Tahoe News* Feb. 17-18 take money to produce. People forget that reporters still cost money. It doesn't matter that their stories are online. The same amount of work goes into a well researched, well written, well edited story no matter the medium.

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