

Submitter: Michael Andersen
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Rules
Measure: HB2605

In 2009, Clay Shirky predicted that in the absence of strong local journalism, "every town in this country of 500,000 or less" would sink into "casual, endemic, civic corruption." 14 years later, we haven't seen a dramatic transition. We've seen, as Shirky warned, a gradual slide. In many places, healthy norms fostered in the era when a local reporter was sitting in the back row of public meetings remain normal. But year by year, place by place, and empty chair by empty chair, those norms will gradually erode as local media outlets close.

In 2018, a Brookings Institution study found that in the years following the closure of a local newspaper, public finances suffer. Municipal borrowing costs increase by 5 to 11 basis points, directly costing the municipality an additional \$650,000 per issue - and, even more importantly, suggesting that a slow rot has set in that threatens the public wallet in unseen ways.

Between 2005 and 2022, one in four U.S. newspapers stopped publishing, including papers in Oregon. Others are ebbing and will close their doors when their current owners fail to find a buyer.

Oregon should not attempt to specifically prop up an industry, newspapers, that's in structural decline. However, Oregonians do have an interest in the continued existence of independent journalism. Preserving it is worth academic investigation and, to some extent, public expenditure.