

## **The Future of the United States**

By Douglas Perret Starr

The United States is in jeopardy. Many newspapers have gone out of business and the rest are in deplorable condition.

If the news media shut down, the United States will no longer boast government of the people, by the people, for the people. The government will be in charge, and the people will be its pawns because there will be no free criticism of the government, no uncensored report on what the government is doing.

Consider what the country would lose without newspapers or news on the World Wide Web. In any country, the press protects and empowers the government, whether it be a dictatorship or a democracy. In a dictatorship, the government is one person, and the people are, at best, puppets. In the United States, as in any democracy, the government is the people, all the people.

Without accurate, objective news reporting, people would be unable to form educated opinions and to take remedial action. It is no accident that the first action taken by incoming dictators is to seize control of the country's newspapers and dictate the editorial stance and the news that will be published.

The only thing worse than no news at all is government control of news.

In the United States, government by the people depends upon people's access to information, information that is provided by the news media, mainly newspapers and their World Wide Web pages and their reporters, news editors, and copyeditors, all of whom contribute to the accuracy and objectivity of the news story.

Newspapers and their World Wide Web pages carry thoroughly detailed news stories, but World Wide Web stories are wordy and do not get to the point immediately. Most readers do not read past the fifth paragraph of any news story, so they miss a lot of detail.

Most radio and television news stories do not provide enough information to arrive at an informed conclusion because they are no more than 60 words long, two or three newspaper sentences, little more detail than a newspaper headline.

Now, more than ever in history, the Bill of Rights guarantees of government by the people depend upon the people and upon newspapers or their World Wide Web pages. So, for the good of the United States, for the good of all the people, these things must happen:

Reporters, regardless of the news medium, must present terse, concise, accurate, objective get-to-the-point accounts of the news of the day. That way, people will know that the news stories are true and correct.

Newspapers must ensure that their reporters live up to the traditions of reporting the news, and must do what county weekly newspapers have been doing for generations: cover their geographic area, focus on what local people are doing.

People must read state, national, and international news in detail every day, either on the World Wide Web or in a newspaper that they subscribe to.

It is too expensive for newspapers to assign their own reporters to cover state, national, and international news. The Associated Press and other news services provide general, but adequate, coverage of those three areas at far less cost to newspapers. And, the AP will provide coverage of specific news events at the request of member newspapers.

People want to see news stories and photographs of neighbors doing things, of children in school and at play, of high school sports, of civic club activities, of family activities, of church activities, of ... of all aspects of life all around them.

Daily newspapers can provide more local news, even if they must reduce publication to the weekend and a few weekdays and reduce the number of pages and the size to tabloid. They can do that by following the lead of weekly newspapers by supplementing their staff with less expensive but professional free-lance reporters, photographers, and columnists, and with paid or unpaid journalism student interns.

People must recognize the overriding importance of the free press and the value of news and the newspaper in their daily lives. People must subscribe to newspapers and must read the news every day.

The end result could be increased circulation and, after the economy settles down, increased newspaper advertising and maybe even more newspapers.

But whatever is done must be done quickly; the future of the United States depends on it.

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