

Newspapers in a post-reading world

I'm embarking on a campaign to highlight a new direction for the North Dakota Newspaper Association. Instead of selling advertising, from here on out, we're selling newspapers.

It may seem counterintuitive to say the NDNA is no longer prioritizing ad sales, but ad revenue no longer supports our larger mission -- from lobbying the Legislature to protect public notice placements, to supporting our publishers when meetings are closed or records are withheld, to keeping North Dakota residents informed about what's happening in their town.

An article I recently came across spells out pretty starkly where we're headed if we don't.

You've heard of a post-truth world? OK, how about a post-reading world? As described in an article last month in The Dispatch, by Claire Lehmann, people are abandoning reading for the equivalent of "the fireside yarn -- what humans did before we emerged from our caves."

Smartphones have become the new hearth, where people gather 'round for information that comes in TikToks, podcasts and talking heads, some of which may be from actual journalists, but most of which trade on vibes, emotion or anger rather than facts.

More and more people are choosing not to be informed by people who are trained in objective storytelling in favor of what advances an agenda or inflames people with unverified information. This is why printed news is so important.

"Sharing knowledge via the written word enhances the accuracy of the transmitted information, whereas oral reinterpretations lend themselves to inefficiency and error," writes Lehmann.

Without someone laying down a printed record, we lose exposure to common truths. People don't understand each other because the institutions that reflect back to us who we are as a group are getting crowded out by a lot of crap that has nothing to do with our everyday lives.

Whines & Roses

By Cecile Wehrman



Speaking to a group of young people at the University of North Dakota's Digital Storytellers Summit recently, I asked for a show of hands.

"How many of you have heard newspapers are dying?"

Almost every hand in the room was raised.

"Do you know how you know that?" I asked. "It's because you read it in a newspaper (or some online regurgitation of it)."

If people can't or don't want to read, how will news travel? And how will that impact North Dakota's communities? This issue is critical -- not just for the newspaper industry, but for society as a whole. In a state where most of our counties have just one news source -- a community newspaper -- we have to find new ways to get people to read it.

Enter a campaign I have dubbed "Read Local."

Much as Shop Local initiatives gained traction in North Dakota, pre-COVID-19, Read Local is aimed at showing people the vital connection between thriving newspapers and thriving communities. Not spending money locally, but paying attention to what's going on in their backyards

-- instead of only on their screens.

There are measurable benefits for communities with newspapers, and measurable detriments for those without them. Helping communities understand those links and increase consumption of local, vetted, reliable information will take the help of teachers, public officials, civic organizations and our trusted elders who grew up in an analog world.

I hope to share this message with all kinds of groups all over the state in the coming months. At the same time, NDNA is engaged with partners to understand the state of local news today, and we will continue programs like Kid Scoop News that encourage students to read.

We'll have to go outside of newspapers to drive home our message -- we'll need our own TikToks and podcasts, sure, but also billboards, vehicle wraps and posters. We must call attention to ourselves in new ways. The health of North Dakota communities depends on it.

(Editor's note: Cecile Wehrman is the executive director of the North Dakota Newspaper Association.)

Figuring it out or leaving it alone

Are you good at figuring things out? If so, good for you. But what I've learned in life is that sometimes you've got to stay out of the way and let things figure themselves out.

Then again, it's good to be aggressive and not to procrastinate. Plus, it's good, when someone says that you can't do something, to show them that you can.

For example, Medora, the cowboy capital of North Dakota, hadn't had a rodeo in 40 years when I told them, years ago, that I was going to create one. It'll never happen, they said, but it did and it's still going.

They also said it'll never happen when I told them I was going to create a student newspaper at Dickinson State University. The president's cabinet will never approve it, they said. So I did it anyway, and thanks to a lot of work by outstanding students, the first edition was a 32-page, four-color magazine.

My high school English teacher once told me that I could say less with more words than anyone she knew. So, I immediately became a minimalist and later mailed her a little article that I'd written for the Los Angeles Times where I mentioned what she'd said. Plus, I added a written note that said, "There, now you're in the Los Angeles Times."

We all like the feeling of accomplishment that comes with doing something that others say you can't. But since no one has appointed any of us as "global president," we don't necessarily have to fix everything, as much as we'd like to. In fact, sometimes it's best to just stay out of the way.

Or as the lyrics of a famous Kenny Rogers song, "The Gambler," says, "You've got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em, know when to walk away and know when to run."

But that's hard for me. If I see a situation that needs to be fixed and I already have a solution, how can I possibly stand by and do nothing?

A Rural Journal

By Kevin Holten



Pat Riley was the coach of the infamous "Showtime" Los Angeles Lakers, and he once said this: "Each warrior wants to leave the mark of his will, his signature, on important acts he touches. This is not the voice of ego but of the human spirit, rising and declaring that it has something to contribute to the solution of the hardest problems, no matter how vexing."

And yet, oftentimes, we need others or God, fate or circumstances to work out a solution for us. Because not everything is in our hands, and it's then that we need to rely on patience and perseverance.

For example, Jackie Robinson of the Brooklyn Dodgers broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball. But at one point he had this to say: "I felt unhappy and trapped. If I left baseball, where could I go, what could I do to earn enough money to help my mother and to marry Rachel? The solution to my problem was only days away in the hands of a tough, shrewd, courageous man called Branch Rickey, the president of the Brooklyn Dodgers."

Basketball legend Michael Jordan once said this: "For a competitive junkie like me, golf is a great solution, because it smacks you in the face every time you think you have accomplished something. That, to me, has taken over a lot of the energy and competitiveness for basketball."

In other words, sometimes it's OK to take a break, because the world is not necessarily yours to fix.

Kevin Holten is an executive producer for RFD-TV and the Cowboy Channel and the creator of Wild Rides TV. He is a native of Wildrose and is now based in Dickinson.

Doing what God called you to do

I visited Kenya recently. We spent most of our time in Nairobi. Nairobi is a huge city and offers many things I can't get in my town: Uber, KFC, people riding on camels.

We traveled about five hours to the Maasai Mara for a safari. We saw lions, giraffes, elephants, hyenas, Cape buffalo, cheetahs and many more. I love looking at nature and seeing what we can learn from it about God.

Elephants, for instance: The elephant's cranium is particularly large and provides enough room for the attachment of muscles to support the entire head. The skull is built to withstand great stress. The

Pastor's Corner

By Holly R. Anderson

St. Luke's Medical Center, Crosby



without comparing ourselves with those around us.

The elephant's trunk is extremely flexible, allowing it to forage and wrestle other elephants. It is powerful enough to lift up to 770 pounds, but it also has the precision to crack a peanut shell without breaking the seed.

1 Corinthians 9:19: "Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible."

To understand what the apostle Paul meant, we must keep the statement in context. Paul was explaining his motivation. Paul had completely abandoned himself to the

purposes of Christ and bore the marks of that decision in his own body.

Stop trying to do what everyone else is doing. Do what God called you to do. We are free to do whatever we want, but the purpose for believers in Christ is to invite others to receive the gift of eternal life in Jesus.

So learn from the elephant, but remember we are not elephants. We would look kind of funny with big gray ears flapping on the sides of our heads.

Pastor's Corner is a meditation provided by members of the Divide County Ministerial Association.

NDGOP resolutions signal continued culture-war push

Members of the North Dakota Republican Party State Committee finally said the quiet part out loud.

This year's controversial library content bill was not about protecting kids from pornography or obscene material.

The bill was more about anti-LGBTQ+ views, as evidenced by a resolution adopted by the NDGOP State Committee at its recent reorganization meeting.

The resolution that chastises the governor for vetoing Senate Bill 2307 doesn't mention books. Or libraries.

It describes the bill as "a necessary measure to safeguard children from dangerous, irreversible medical interventions and harmful ideologies that threaten their health, identity and development."

It goes on to state that the state Republican Party "stands for parental rights, biological reality, and the protection of children from coercion, confusion, and irreversible harm."

The resolution calls on Republican lawmakers to make it a priority in the 2027 session to pass legislation that "fully protects children from gender transition procedures and other harmful interven-

Other Views

By Amy Dalrymple

North Dakota Monitor



many of which had LGBTQ+ characters or themes. Another bill supporter pointed to controversy surrounding a book in a school library that was part of an LGBTQ+ graphic novel series. But the resolution makes it clear that the bill took aim at giving children access to LGBTQ+ books.

The resolution carries no weight and doesn't even necessarily reflect the views of a majority of North Dakota Republican Party members. But it was supported by a majority of NDGOP district chairs who participated in the June 14 meeting, signaling the type of candidates these districts are likely to endorse. Republicans hold all elected state offices and supermajorities in the Legislature.

The State Committee adopted another resolution expressing anti-LGBTQ+ views as Bismarck-area community members gathered across the street at the Capitol grounds for an annual Pride event.

A resolution meant to support two-parent families defines marriage as a "sacred covenant between one man and one woman." It references the "biological reality of male and female

and says families "anchored by a married mother and father" are essential to society.

The issue of same-sex marriage was raised in the 2025 legislative session, with the North Dakota House approving a resolution opposing it and the Senate later defeating the resolution.

The fact that the Republican majority in the Legislature had already waved the white flag on some culture war topics didn't stop the State Committee from charging ahead.

Members also adopted a resolution that advocates for making it a crime to get an abortion or assist someone in ending a pregnancy.

It's a position that some North Dakota anti-abortion advocates have opposed and party members who participated in last year's state convention rejected.

The resolution says "preborn human beings are entitled to the full and equal protection of the laws that prohibit violence against other human beings."

In addition, it states "anyone who purposefully ends the life of a preborn child is legally answerable for the crime, whether they be a principal offender,

accomplice, or co-conspirator of the act."

The resolution also notes that medication abortion is readily accessible and "abortion will remain widespread and legal in North Dakota as long as abortions can be self-administered with impunity."

Sen. Janne Myrdal, R-Edinburg, a stalwart anti-abortion advocate in the Legislature, opposed the similarly worded resolution considered at the state convention last year.

In an interview last month, Myrdal said she hadn't seen the latest version but continues to disagree with the approach.

"I just don't think there's any purpose in putting women in jail," Myrdal said.

During the legislative session earlier this year, lawmakers voted down a fetal personhood bill that would have allowed women who obtain abortions to be charged with murder.

North Dakota in 2023 outlawed all abortions except when the pregnancy posed a serious health risk to the life of the mother, or in cases of rape or incest in the first six weeks of pregnancy. That law was deemed unconstitutional and struck down by a district court

judge last fall, who found that women have a right to obtain an abortion until the point of fetal viability. The North Dakota Supreme Court has yet to rule on the state's appeal.

State Committee members also supported the display of the Ten Commandments on government property and public schools, similar to legislation that failed earlier this year.

Brady Pelton, chair of Bismarck's District 32, said he was "extremely disappointed" with some of the resolutions. He said the resolutions, which passed with split votes, didn't go through the usual vetting process and don't fully reflect the views of North Dakota Republicans.

Even though these resolutions carry no weight, they're an indication that the push for culture war bills that many North Dakotans are tired of is likely to continue.

Amy Dalrymple is editor-in-chief of the North Dakota Monitor, a nonprofit, nonpartisan source for trusted news, commentary and insight into statewide policy and critical issues affecting the Peace Garden State. Follow at northdakotamonitor.com. Republished with permission.

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