

De-Pressed

Here's a story the print press doesn't really want to report – many American newspapers are in big trouble. Earnings at The New York Times Company, for example, are down more than 50% this quarter, the Los Angeles Times has changed its editor and editorial director in the face of steep circulation declines, and scores of other papers are having major problems convincing consumers to buy their product.

There are a number of reasons for the depressing situation, pardon the pun. The internet provides news efficiently, the decline of public education means fewer Americans care about what's going on, and people are very busy these days. Many of us don't have time to spend an hour reading the paper.

But the collapse of journalistic standards is another reason some have turned away from the press. Most Americans are not ideological junkies, craving their daily dose of political propaganda. Just give us the facts, and some lively opinion based on the facts. The political jihadists who have taken over some newspapers are driving people away.

Here's an example. In the 30 days following Hurricane Katrina, The New York Times ran 53 columns criticizing President Bush on its editorial pages. Even Barbra Streisand might consider that overkill.

The Boston Globe, which is owned by The New York Times, has one conservative columnist and ten liberal ones. So why would any conservative bother with the paper?

Over at the Washington Post, an editor named Marie Arana criticized her own paper saying: "The elephant in the newsroom is our narrowness. Too often, we wear liberalism on our sleeve and we are intolerant of other lifestyles and opinions ... if you work here, you must be one of us. You must be liberal, progressive, a Democrat."

So why would any Republican buy The Washington Post?

Every newspaper has the right to take a point of view on its editorial pages, but when a political bias becomes so pervasive it affects everyone in the newsroom, you know things are out of control. Imagine a New York Times reporter walking into office and asking colleagues: "Hey, did you see 'The O'Reilly Factor' last night? It was great."

I'm sure that happens all the time.

And then there is the hate factor. Not only do many newspapers aggressively push an agenda, but they demonize those with whom they disagree.

Recently, a columnist for The Dallas Morning News wrote that I, your humble correspondent, was partially responsible for the murders of six Mexicans in Georgia because I support strict security on the southern border. The woman actually wrote that I had said hateful things about migrants.

When Fox News produced videotape which showed the exact opposite, that I had openly sympathized with migrants, the editors at The Dallas Morning News at first refused to issue a correction, and only after a torrent of outrage from subscribers did it finally do so.

With all this dopey stuff swirling around the print press, it is no wonder millions of Americans are saying "see ya." But nobody should be celebrating this. Newspapers have the space and resources to do reporting the other media cannot do. Newspapers are vital to the American electorate.

But the print press needs to clean itself up and fast. Because once the folks leave the party, it's tough to get them back.