

David vs. Goliath: Oregon bill offers lifeline for Journalism—and Democracy

Have you ever worked on a group project and then had someone else take full credit for your contributions? It's fundamentally unfair, isn't it?

And for Oregon news organizations, the pain is felt in the pocketbook.

Newspapers are businesses, and everyone knows our revenue model has changed radically as readers migrated to Big Tech platforms online. But Google and Facebook have used our work to fuel their growth, without compensating us.

In an era where information is abundant but trust is scarce, local journalism remains one of the last bastions of accountability, transparency, and civic connection. Yet, across Oregon, newsrooms are shrinking, reporters are vanishing, and communities are losing access to the reliable information they need to make informed decisions.

Senate Bill 686 offers a bold and necessary first step towards a solution.

This legislation would require dominant tech platforms—like Google and Meta—to compensate Oregon news organizations for using the content they scrape from our websites to drive traffic and profits. These platforms have used local reporting to generate significant profits for years, yet they return little to nothing to the journalists and publishers who produce it. SB686 would help correct that imbalance.

This is not a tax. It's not a subsidy. It's compensation for value taken in the form of direct payment to news organizations using formal arbitration or a research-backed fund to set benchmarks.

Platforms scrape and summarize journalism, keeping users on their sites and siphoning away the revenue that once supported local reporting, and this problem has only gotten worse with the advent of artificial intelligence. The result? Fewer reporters, fewer investigations, and fewer watchdogs in our communities.

SB686 is modeled after other successful efforts. It ensures that 90% of the funds collected go directly to publishers, with the remaining 10% supporting innovation and equity in Oregon's media ecosystem. It's a plan that supports both large and small outlets, urban and rural, print and digital. And it creates a platform for additional investment in reporting across the entire state.

Critics claim this bill threatens free speech or innovation. But legal experts - including a former Oregon Supreme Court justice - have affirmed its constitutionality. And innovation doesn't mean exploitation. It's time for Big Tech to innovate responsibly and pay fairly.

Now, Big Tech is launching a fear campaign, threatening to throttle information in retaliation. This bill has broad support from journalists, publishers, labor unions, broadcasters, academics, and civic leaders - including Governor Tina Kotek.

At the end of the day, this isn't just about journalism. It's about democracy. When local news disappears, civic engagement declines, corruption increases, and polarization deepens. SB686 is a chance to reverse that trend—to invest in the infrastructure of truth, trust, and community.

Typically fiercely competitive, news organizations around the state have united in support of this bill to publish this editorial. We urge all Oregonians to contact their state legislators to voice their support for SB686. Let's stand up for local news, for fair play, and for a future where every Oregonian has access to the information they need to thrive.

Not sure who your legislator is? Check here: <https://gov.oregonlive.com/legislators/>

The Oregonian/Oregonlive co-authored with the Lake Oswego Review, The Chronicle in Springfield, The Columbia Gorge News with 46 additional news organizations endorsing across Oregon.

Argus Observer (Ontario)
BakerCityHerald.com
Beaverton Valley Times/Tigard-Tualatin Times
Bend Bulletin
Bluemountaineagle.com
Canby Herald-Pioneer
Cannon Beach Gazette
Central Oregonian (Prineville)
The Chronicle (Springfield)
Columbia Gorge News
Coquille Valley Sentinel (Coquille)
Cottage Grove Sentinel
Curry Coastal Pilot (Brookings)
Curry County Reporter (Gold Beach)
The Daily Astorian
East Oregonian
Estacada News
Eugene Register Guard
Forest Grove News-Times
Grants Pass Daily Courier
Herald and News
HermistonHerald.com
Hillsboro Tribune
The Gresham Outlook

LaGrandeObserver.com
Lake Oswego Review
Lakeview Examiner
Lincoln City Leader
The Madras Pioneer
Myrtle Point Herald
McKenzieRiverReflections.com
The Newberg Graphic
The New Era (Sweet Home)
The News-Register (McMinnville)
The News-Review (Roseburg)
North Coast Citizen
Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association
The Oregonian
Polk Co. Itemizer Observer (Dallas)
Port Orford News
Redmond Spokesman
Rogue Valley Times (Medford)
The Sandy Post
South County Spotlight (Scappoose)
Seaside Signal
Siuslaw News (Florence)
Tillamook Headlight Herald
Wallowa.com
West Linn Tidings
Wilsonville Spokesman
Woodburn Independent
The World (Coos Bay)