

The Register-Guard

Local press vital in keeping spotlight on climate change

By Bob Doppelt

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These are challenging times. As the chances of civilization-altering climate disruption accelerate, the Trump administration is sabotaging efforts to reduce the crisis to manageable levels. This insane behavior is one outcome of the president's intent to dismantle the institutions, laws and norms that sustain our democracy to benefit himself and his fellow oligarchs. Unprecedented levels of scrutiny and forbearance — especially by the local media — are necessary to defend our republic and protect life on earth.

Two weeks ago the Register Guard joined 350 other newspapers nationwide in publishing an editorial rebutting the president's claim that the media are the enemies of the people. Readers should be extremely proud of the editorial page staff for taking this stand. It underscores the important role local media play in speaking truth to power.

It will be vital for local media to continue this practice during the remainder of the Trump administration. The new book "How Democracies Die" issues an urgent warning about Trump's inclination to push our nation toward authoritarianism.

The book describes four key indicators seen in Germany in the 1930s, and more recently in Peru, Venezuela, Russia and other countries that spiraled into authoritarianism:

- 1) A weak or non-existent commitment among those in power to the rules and norms of democracy.

- 2) A constant effort among politicians to describe their political opponents as criminals or in other ways deny their legitimacy.
- 3) Tacit support for, or a refusal to openly condemn, violence by their supporters.
- 4) Recurring threats to punish or in other ways curtail the civil rights of the media and other critics.

Persistent falsehoods by authorities are part and parcel of every indicator. Trump's behaviors and speech are right out of the authoritarian playbook. The local media have a responsibility to aggressively challenge him and inform the public.

One outcome of his authoritarian cravings is Trump's climate denial. It is clearly linked to his desire to eradicate all constraints on corporations, and the fossil fuel industry in particular. The media must relentlessly tell Americans how this administration is neutering laws and regulations intended to protect them by preventing runaway climate disruption.

Persistent reporting, editorials and opinion pieces are also indispensable to shine the light on proven solutions and climate-damaging practices by state and local governments, businesses, financial institutions and others. It is equally important to highlight new scientific research.

A paper published this month in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, for instance, describes how human-caused greenhouse gas emissions and degradation of forests and other ecosystems that sequester carbon are activating feedbacks in the climate system. These feedbacks, in turn, are beginning to activate yet other feedbacks that, left unaddressed, will make it increasingly difficult to prevent runaway climate disruption.

The disturbing scenario described in the paper should alarm everyone and elicit a wartime-like mass mobilization to prevent catastrophe. Not surprisingly, neither Trump nor his agencies uttered a word about it.

As they have done on a monthly basis for the past nine years, however, the editorial pages of The Register-Guard published this column, which allows

me to describe the study. The Register Guard is the only local newspaper in the U.S., to my knowledge, that has regularly published editorials and opinion pieces about climate and sustainability issues.

The local press is an indispensable bulwark of democracy. In this precarious time in our history, the Register-Guard and other local media must continue to speak truth to power about Trump — and all other officials, no matter what their political affiliation — by maintaining robust reporting and opinion pages.

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