



# The Working Press

## Newspapers losing the war to the Internet

*Massive workforce 'downsizing,' even 'outsourcing,' seen in wake of communications revolution.*

GEORGE NEUMAYR

SCRAMBLING TO compete with the Internet, newspapers up and down California continue to cashier reporters and editors. The *San Francisco Chronicle* is reportedly hemorrhaging a million dollars a week. This has forced it to cut a quarter of its workforce. "This sucks, there is no question about it," says editor Phil Bronstein. Meanwhile, the *Los Angeles Times* proceeds with its "voluntary and involuntary employee separation program," in the words of editor James O'Shea. In late May 57 *Times* staffers departed.

Google executive Marissa Mayer, addressing a journalism conference in the Bay Area in May, said: "We are computer scientists, not journalists." But it doesn't matter; the computer scientists are winning. By simply regurgitating news items other "content providers" cobble together and then disseminating them online, Google (along with other Internet companies) are running circles around reporter-staffed outlets, reaping advertising profits without having to hire a single journalist.

Under these pressures, publishers are searching for the cheapest labor possible. Is it conceivable that the "outsourcing" trends seen in other professions will begin to appear in journalism? According to the *Los Angeles Times*, James Macpherson, publisher of the *Pasadena Now* website, is pursuing that improbable strategy already: he is "outsourcing" reporting jobs to India. He hired one reporter from Mumbai and another from Bangalore. They will be "covering" the Pasadena City Council. One will earn \$12,000 a year; the other will earn \$7,200.

How can they cover Pasadena from India? "The council broadcasts its meetings on the Web. From nearly 9,000 miles away, the outsourced journalists plan

to watch, then write their stories while their boss sleeps — India is 12.5 hours ahead of Pacific Standard Time," reports the *Times*. "A lot of the routine stuff we do can be done by really talented people in another time zone at much lower wages," Macpherson blithely told the paper.

He advertised the jobs on the "Indian version of Craigslist," and he will "add some local flavor by doing interviews, then e-mailing the recordings to India," says the paper.

Perhaps it is not surprising that Macpherson found interested applicants in India. While newspapers wither away in America, they are booming in India, a country of 1.1 billion people, hundreds of millions of whom are literate. "From 2005 to 2006, nearly 2,100 newspapers made their debut in India, joining 60,000 already circulating," reports the *Times*. Ironically, India, known for its high-tech contribution to America, has a strong newspaper-reading culture in part because few people have Internet access.



LOS ANGELES TIMES media columnist Tim Rutten frequently pontificates on what constitutes journalistic balance though he rarely observes it himself. By balanced journalism, Rutten means journalism that advances the tenets of his brand of liberalism. He confirmed as much in an appearance before students from California State University at Northridge in May. Speaking at a media forum, he urged the students to embrace "radical journalism," according to the CSUN student newspaper, *The Daily Sundial*.

In other words, "radical journalism" and balanced

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# THE FRONT LINE

## Teapot tempest on CRP staffing

Some activists voiced concern over California Republican Party Chairman Ron Nehring's hiring of two non-citizens for key state Party posts: Australian Michael Kamburowski, the state GOP's chief operations officer, and Canadian Christopher Matthews as state deputy political director. The activists, fearing a PR hit, cite a mid-June *San Francisco Chronicle* story on the hires portraying them as a slap at the state and nation.

The "California Republican Party has decided no American is qualified to take one of its most crucial positions," begins the newspaper's "news" story, displaying its anti-GOP bias a bit obviously even for the *Chron*. Reporter Carla Marinucci lavishly quotes former state GOP Party spokeswoman Karen Hanretty lamenting the "insulting" and "embarrassing" decision "to bring people from the outside who don't know the difference between Lodi and Lancaster."

This tempest-in-a-teapot, if it is even that, begins with the glib premise that such hires are made the way an NFL team, say, sifts through hundreds of coaching candidates searching for the best available man. Anyone at all familiar with internal Party staffing knows that the woods are thick with highly qualified candidates for

each job and that the hiring decision, given largely comparable levels of expertise, depends heavily on such factors as personal loyalty to, and a record of working well with, the official doing the hiring and the political program to be deployed.

This is politics, Ms. Marinucci, a world whose culture the *Chron* reporter, it seems, is still getting to know. Or perhaps it's just that the *Chronicle* has decided no unbiased reporter is qualified to cover politics in its



news pages.

Senator Tom McClintock's Citizens for the California Republic ([www.CARepublic.com](http://www.CARepublic.com)), has largely removed the threat of tax increases from this year's budget negotiations. Last April, McClintock, backed up by CFCR's grass roots muscle, secured 15 senator and 31 Assembly member signatures on contracts with their constituents not to raise taxes — more than enough to stop a two-thirds vote. Since then, McClintock has used organization and new

technology to educate voters about issues and help them get to know other GOP leaders.

A recent Tele-Town Hall conference call with Congressman Duncan Hunter helped mobilize opposition to the Kennedy-McCain-Bush immigration bill. McClintock, yet to endorse a GOP presidential candidate, has been approached for support or assistance by campaign representatives from Tom Tancredo, Ron Paul, Jim Gilmore, John McCain, Fred Thompson, and Duncan Hunter.

Hunter spent an hour with tens of thousands of McClintock's CFCR members immediately following the New Hampshire candidates' debate. McClintock complimented Hunter for arguing during the debate that "it's time Republican leaders stopped listening to the Kennedy wing of the party" — possibly a reference to John McCain's public consultation with Democrat Ted Kennedy before voting on key immigration bill amendments.

More than 52,000 calls were placed during the hour. (Hear the entire call at CFCR online, which now provides podcasts.) 21,000 citizen activists joined the conference call during the hour, with between 2,000 and 4,000 on the line at any one time. It required only a few seconds to generate 2,300 names on the protest petition opposing the immigration bill. This is a powerful, new grassroots weapon.