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OUR VIEW: Newspaper industry bill is essential

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The COVID-19 pandemic has affected businesses of all the kinds the past year-plus, and community newspapers like this one have been no exception.

A new version of a bipartisan bill aimed at helping the newspaper industry continue to do the essential work of keeping you informed, making sure government leaders are working in your best interests and defending your right to know has been introduced in Congress by Reps. Ann Kirkpatrick (D-Ariz.) and Dan Newhouse (R-Wash.).

The Local Journalism Sustainability Act seeks to help local newspapers sustain financial viability through five-year tax credits for subscribers, advertisers and publishers.

When a previous version of the bill was introduced last year, it was cosponsored by 78 members of Congress — 58 Democrats and 20 Republicans —, including North Country Congresswoman Elise Stefanik (R-Schuylerville).

We support Kirkpatrick and Newhouse's latest effort to boost the important work that community newsrooms do.

- For readers, it would provide money to cover 80 percent of subscription fees up to \$250 annually to local newspapers for the first year and 50 percent after that.
- For small businesses, it would provide funds to cover 80 percent of advertising costs with local newspapers or broadcast station up to \$5,000 in the first year, and up to \$2,500 in the subsequent four years.
- For publishers, it would provide tax credits to reduce employment taxes and help local newspapers hire and pay journalists.

"By providing tax credits for readers and small businesses and by empowering our local journalists, we can begin to help our small newspapers remain resilient and continue to provide in-depth perspectives that inform their readership regarding local current events," Newhouse said.

Dean Ridings, CEO of America's Newspapers, one of the industry's largest advocates for newspapers, said the act would "provide meaningful assistance as newspapers seek to provide information in new ways to meet the needs of their audience."

Niagara Gazette and Lockport Union Sun & Journal Publisher John Celestino also supports the measure.

"Congressional support for the institution of journalism is an extremely welcoming concept," he said.

"There is nothing more important than keeping our communities well-informed and our local businesses succeeding."

The newspaper industry was facing struggles before the pandemic and COVID only made them worse.

This bill is designed to help publications sustain themselves through this crisis and beyond.

So many other industries have deservedly received federal aid in the wake of the pandemic, and it seems only fitting that the newspaper industry, such a vital cog in our democracy, gets some help too.

We hope Congress, including Stefanik, recognizes the importance of this latest legislation and joins together to pass it.

This legislation would go a long way to help local news in all communities survive and flourish as we continue to wade through turbulent waters.

— Plattsburgh Press Republican