

OPINION

THE GOSHEN NEWS

Now in our 188th year

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THE FIRST AMENDMENT: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

ELSEWHERE

Shedding light amid Trump's public records blackout

The second go-round of a Donald Trump presidential administration has been punctuated by dramatic changes.

Lost amid all the scrutiny of mass firings by Trump's Department of Government Efficiency and other sweeping changes was a particularly troubling decision, as reported by the Poynter Institute in February, to fire federal staff responsible for responding to Freedom of Information Law requests.

CNN first reported that its attempt to obtain records related to security clearances for Trump's top aide Elon Musk through a FOIA request filed with the Office of Personal Management was met with an email that read: "Good luck with that."

It highlights Trump's attitude toward the traditional media, a dark reminder of how he has so often cast reporters as "enemies of the people" in the past.

AS POYNTER NOTED, the federal government — and we would add most levels of government — have traditionally struggled to respond to legal requests for public information in a timely fashion.

Firing the staff responsible for fulfilling requests certainly won't make things better at the federal level.

Washington Post FOIA director Nate Jones summed the situation up best: "Anytime that whole FOIA offices are getting fired, it portends terrible things."

Terry Mutchler, an attorney and former journalist who serves as vice president of the National Freedom of Information Coalition's board, took it a step further, saying: "I think that reporters, as is the American citizen, are in for a boatload of trouble in the next four years in this regard."

We wholeheartedly agree.

WE ALSO MUST consider an even darker possibility — that the Trump administration's attitude about public records requests will filter down to state and local governments.

Access to records at all levels has been a key element of investigative journalism for decades. Reporters have used such information to enlighten readers and highlight corruption and problems in government to drive voters and citizens to demand change.

We struggle to understand how any American — Right-leaning, Left-leaning or middle-of-the-road — can support any administration's efforts to limit access to what should be public information.

While not having FOIA officers in place certainly spells trouble, it's important to stress that it does not relieve the federal government of its responsibility to process public records requests under timeframes prescribed by law.

Reporters, editors and readers must understand that public agencies are still required, by law, to respond to formal requests for information in a timely fashion. Failure to do so can lead to court action, an often time-consuming and potentially costly step in the process that news outlets may well need to consider more often in light of current circumstances.

The best defense to all of this remains one of the simplest: reminding audiences of their right — their American right — to know.

JUST AS CNN did in its reporting on the Office of Personnel Management's "Good Luck with that" email response to its FOIA request, all media members and news outlets must consistently inform the public whenever their government withholds what should be public information. That step in the process should also underscore how such documents often contain information about the cost of government, a cost borne by taxpayers themselves.

Jones, who writes a column where he regularly documents the ups and downs of public records requests made by The Washington Post, made a great recommendation when he encouraged news outlets to "be transparent with the readership about the federal government's failings in following the law or withholding information."

We would only add that a similar standard must also be applied to local and state reporting.

"Let the public know about their losses: 'We requested this information under FOIA. Public, don't you think that you have the right to it?'" Jones told Poynter.

At a time when the current administration is thumbing its nose at the media and the public's right to know, it's as important as ever for journalists, newspapers and news outlets to help the American public understand the difference between rhetoric and responsibility.

In other words, our job is to tell them as often as necessary that there can be no America "of the people, by the people and for the people" when there is no or limited access to information about how tax money is being allocated or how public resources are being used.

— *The Niagara Gazette, New York*

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Reader disappointed in senators

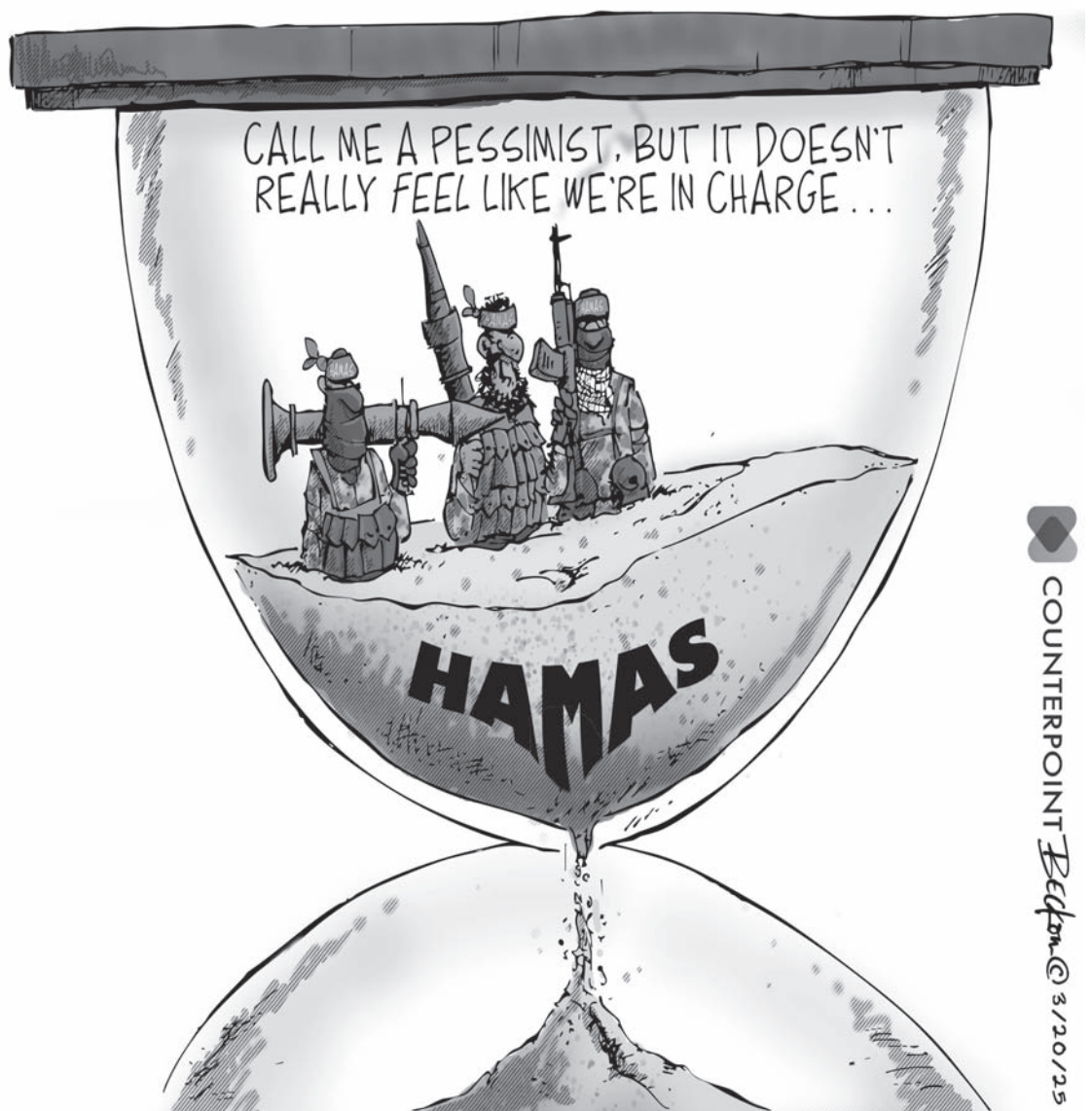
Dear Editor,
I'm extremely disappointed in our two senators Todd Young and Jim Banks. They both have followed the "Musk/Trump" agenda without question. In addition to Trump's lack of moral character, I have heard nothing from our two senators about this convicted felon who is charged with 32 felonies, sexual assaults, and prolific lying among other shortcomings. They have approved the Musk/Trump cabinet made up of very unqualified members who would deny American Aid funds to millions of people, decreasing FEMA in a time of many natural disasters, decreasing funds of the Department of Education, and decreasing funds for medical research including cancer and Alzheimer's among others. Their cuts would also affect veterans, Indiana farmers and cause higher costs of living for all which is already evident. These are just some of the things our two

senators seem to have approved.

It is especially disheartening to see Elon Musk, the richest man in the world, a man we did not elect, deny food to hungry people. Our senators have also remained silent over Trump's foolish desire to buy Greenland, control the Panama Canal, make Canada the 51st state, and control Gaza by ethnic cleansing the Palestinians and building resorts. Where is the outrage over such childish, idiotic thinking? He is obviously in cognitive decline.

The Musk/Trump agenda lacks basic decency. Surely our senators recognize that. But they are silent. Our representative, Rudy Yakym seems to show the same lack of courage to stand up to the Musk/Trump presidency. Would that our elected representatives heed the words of the ancient prophet Micah 6:8 "What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God." None of these admonitions are being followed by our current leaders.

Myron Schrag, Goshen



Why does it matter who shot JFK?

This week, the Trump administration released tens of thousands of documents regarding the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Speculation about the "real explanation" for JFK's assassination has been an enormous cottage industry for decades; as of November 2023, a Gallup poll showed that 65% of Americans believe that people other than Lee Harvey Oswald were involved in the murder. At no point since the assassination have a majority of Americans believed the truth: that Oswald was a lone gunman.

Perhaps that's because the idea of a lone gunman achieving such a high-profile assassination on camera in the modern age seems so unthinkable. But, of course, it isn't: William McKinley was assassinated by a lone gunman in 1901; Teddy Roosevelt was shot in the chest in 1912 while campaigning for president; in 1933, FDR narrowly escaped assassination when Giuseppe Zangara fired five shots at him, killing the mayor of Chicago; Gerald Ford was nearly assassinated twice in a three week stretch in 1975; John Hinckley Jr. shot Ronald Reagan just a few weeks into Reagan's presidency in 1981; and, of course, Donald Trump was nearly assassinated during a campaign speech last year. In other words, presidential assassinations are shockingly common.

So why are so many Americans convinced, despite all available evidence, that others were involved in the JFK assassination? Much of it has to do with the rapidly declining levels of trust in the American



Ben Shapiro
SYNDICATED COLUMNIST

government since the 1960s. While only 52% of Americans believed in a JFK conspiracy theory in 1963 — an idea fostered by legacy media, which claimed that he had been killed by right-wing "hate" — by 1976, that number had skyrocketed to 81%. That trend correlates with a radical increase in distrust in government generally: In 1964, some 77% of Americans said that they trusted the government to do the right thing always or most of the time; by 1976, that number had dropped to 35%. (As of 2024, by the way, that number is 22%.)

Now, distrust of government is a perfectly normal and even admirable feature of American political life dating back to the founding. The founders distrusted government not to abuse the rights of individuals, and thus sought checks and balances to prevent it from occurring. But since the 1960s, American distrust of government has been matched by a massive expansion of governmental intrusion. All of which suggests that our modern distrust of government carries with it a different flavor: a flavor of the conspiratorial. The founders believed that ambition was common to all men, and that

ambition thus had to counteract ambition; today's Americans instead believe that the problem is that our government is staffed by uniquely bad men.

The founders were right: the corruption of government is innately connected to its scope. But today's Americans instead believe that the corruption of government is simply a question of the wrong people controlling the government. The problem isn't a government with too much power, but a government controlled by enemies.

Now, undoubtedly, there are awful people in government. And certainly there have been conspiracies of such awful people within government (see, for example, the Anthony Fauci-led attacks by career staffers on those who opposed COVID-19 lockdowns). But if we misattribute broad and endemic problems of government to such conspiracies despite all available evidence, we miss the point: We maintain the size and scope of government while hunting shadows, and training ourselves to distrust our own eyes in the process.

Conspiracies exist. But they require evidence. Otherwise, they're conspiracy theories. And a country that falls for conspiracy theories without any supporting evidence is a country ripe for the plucking by demagogues on all sides.

Ben Shapiro is a graduate of UCLA and Harvard Law School, host of "The Ben Shapiro Show," and co-founder of Daily Wire+. He is a three-time New York Times bestselling author.

A message to the residents of Nappanee

As we mark our historic 150th anniversary, I find myself reflecting on how far we've come since 1874 and the challenges that could impact our future. If you haven't already heard, the state legislature is considering property tax reform legislation, which on its surface sounds pretty good to me and every other homeowner, but in its current form would impair our ability to maintain the services and quality of life that make Nappanee special.

Our Sesquicentennial celebrations highlighted both our history and progress: the Woodview Drive project improving safety and connecting our trail system, our Downtown Master Plan bringing new businesses through the Forgivable Loan Program, and breaking ground on the fire station that will replace our 1970 facility with living quarters for full-time firefighters and paramedics. These achievements represent our community's dedication to thoughtful growth.

What you might not know is that we've accomplished this while reducing our property tax rate by 14% since 2016, from \$1.68 to \$1.44 per \$100 of assessed value. This prudent management has allowed us to maintain reserves while funding capital projects without burdening taxpayers. We have worked hard to ensure we remain fiscally responsible while still investing in our community's future. The legislation in the statehouse upends this careful stewardship by freezing the Maximum Levy Growth Quotient — the calculation that determines



Phil Jenkins
MAYOR OF NAPPANEE

our funding — at 0% in 2026, 1% in 2027, and 2% in 2028. For perspective, this creates an immediate \$300 million cut statewide in year one, growing to \$800 million by year three. These aren't just numbers — they represent potential cuts to services our residents rely on daily.

It's frustrating to me that people who rarely visit Nappanee are hoping to significantly erode the only steady revenue source local communities control. This doesn't feel like it's about providing property tax relief, more like centralizing power while forcing local officials to make impossible choices between essential services. For Nappanee, these cuts would permanently damage our revenue base with impacts that compound year after year. With century-old water and sewer infrastructure needing replacement, roads requiring continuous maintenance, and potential partnerships with residential and commercial developers that could bring unprecedented growth, this bill would force us to scale back essential services or find alternative funding methods that ultimately burden residents.

In my State of the City address, I discussed options we're reluctantly considering because of this effort at the statehouse: local income taxes, motor vehicle taxes, and shifting the burden of trash and recycling services to resident's utility bills. Make no mistake — these aren't solutions we want, but desperate measures forced upon us by lawmakers who are disconnected from the realities of local governance. Instead of having a transparent property tax system, we would be forced to make major service cuts or piece together a patchwork of fees and smaller taxes. As we finalize the items for our Sesquicentennial Time Capsule to be opened in 2074, I wonder what future generations will find. Will they see a vibrant community that overcame challenges through local decision-making, or one hamstrung by state mandates that damaged our ability to serve residents? Will they read about how we completed our 20-year comprehensive plan, or how that vision was abandoned due to state-imposed funding cuts?

I urge you to contact our representatives about property taxes and the real-world consequences for Nappanee. Our community has flourished through local decision-making for 150 years. Let's ensure the next 150 aren't compromised by shortsighted legislation designed to score easy points at the expense of our city's future.

Phillip W. Jenkins is the mayor of Nappanee