

**Hard times for news in NH**

**New Hampshire Center for Public Interest Journalism publishes InDepthNH.org.**

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 **New Hampshire news that matters  
  
OUR MISSION:**

Money and special interests are exerting ever-increasing influence on government. At the same time, legacy media outlets are drastically reducing their public interest and investigative reporting while reducing staff and the money they spend fighting for citizens’ right-to-know in New Hampshire. To counter these troubling trends, InDepthNH.org reports unbiased news without fear or favor that informs citizens about matters of public interest and moves them to action as full participants in their democracy. Our nonprofit online news outlet increases watchdog journalism to reveal injustices and hold government accountable while giving voice to marginalized people, places and ideas. We offer our stories free to all New Hampshire media to buoy journalism’s many important voices here. We partner with organizations willing to fight for government transparency and experiment with new models with which to challenge government secrecy. InDepthNH.org seeks to uncover government influence-peddling, wrongdoing, corruption and unfairness.

**WHO WE ARE:**

InDepthNH.org’s Executive Editor Nancy West has won many awards for investigative reporting during her 30 years at the New Hampshire Union Leader. She has taught investigative journalism at the New England Center for Investigative Reporting at Boston University. West is passionate about government transparency. Her reporting over the years uncovered and put a halt to a secret file docketing system at the New Hampshire Supreme Court. Her persistence helped to open state parole board hearings to the media and public. West reported that 43 convicted murderers are free on lifetime parole, but New Hampshire officials won’t say where they live or what is required of them or their parole officers. West exposed a secretive, broken system that is failing to make sure defendants know about a police officer’s dishonesty before the officer testifies against them as constitutionally guaranteed. Because of her reporting, three murderers were recently notified 20 years after their convictions that prosecutors had failed to do so, opening the door for each of them to seek a new trial. West recently was awarded her second Fund for Investigative Journalism grant. She also exposed the case of a man who was locked up for seven years in the state prison Secure Psychiatric Unit even though he wasn’t convicted of a crime. His attorneys credit West’s reporting with helping to secure his release.

**BUSINESS PLAN:** The lust for politics and civic participation in New Hampshire is legendary as our 1.3 million people last year celebrated the 100th anniversary of the 1916 presidential primary election. We have boasted the first-in-the-nation presidential primary for almost that long, bringing massive media attention to the state, often after winning the battle with some upstart state trying to muscle in on our prized primary position. Hopeful candidates traipse here every four years to shake hands with as many voters as possible while kissing their babies in this relatively small state bordering Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts and Canada. We are one of only two states that elect a governor every two years, and are home to the nation’s largest lower House, the third largest parliamentary body in the world, with 424 members. There’s another 80 elected officers in 10 counties in a state crawling with elected aldermen, selectmen, and even elected cemetery trustees. As former Republican Gov. Hugh Gregg wrote, “It is doubtful that any other state conducts as many elections with greater frequency.” New Hampshire is always in election mode, Gregg said. “It’s a way of life for our citizens that results not only in extensive political experience, but a very serious approach to participatory involvement in government at all levels.” Gregg, whose son, Judd Gregg, also served as governor, U.S. Congressman and U.S. Senator, quipped, “At some time during their life most New Hampshire residents will have held either an elective or an appointive office.” That means New Hampshire folks have a keen interest in consuming investigative and enterprise news that holds government accountable.

InDepthNH.org will always maintain our mission first, but funding to make it possible will be equally important. Income generators will be put in place from the start. Our first two additions will be a contract underwriting salesperson to increase revenue and write grants, and a freelance reporter to increase the coverage that will draw more frequent visitors to the site. We partner with legacy news outlets in New Hampshire and offer our stories to them for free. We augment their coverage; we don’t compete.

**MISSION MATTERS:**    While funding is essential to sustainability, we will make sure to focus on our core mission to increase enterprise and investigative news, improve legal models to hold government accountable, and give voice to all people, including those whose voices have been rarely heard in legacy media such as minorities, women, children, immigrants, the LGBT community, the elderly, disabled people, the poor and felons. We want to hire reporters to cover family issues such as healthcare, mental illness, poverty, child abuse and education. That beat would be expansive as what happens in families and schools also impacts business, employment and the criminal justice system. We also want to hire an environmental reporter because there is no journalist in the state covering strictly environmental issues. InDepthNH.org also partners with schools and universities to train the next generation of journalists and news consumers. We currently direct two interns, one from Keene State College, Tori Tucker, who writes The Gay Agenda, a column dedicated to issues in the LGBT community, and another from Southern New Hampshire University who is studying how to cover political news.

  
**DECLINES, STEEP DECLINES:**  
    Despite the true enjoyment New Hampshire people derive from participating in their government, the last decade has seen a frightening decline in the amount and quality of in-depth news they get in general. Steep drops in circulation and advertising revenue along with the dramatic shift in news consumption to the Internet and social media have ravaged the newspaper industry across the country, but even more so in New Hampshire.  According to Pew Research, there was a 35 percent decline in the number of statehouse reporters from 2003 to 2014 across the country, slightly higher than the overall decline in newsroom staffing during that period. That drop was likely even steeper in New Hampshire. A once-bustling press room at the State House in Concord years ago hosted six or seven full-time reporters, with extra reporters assigned during busy sessions. The state with the highest rate of full-time statehouse reporters per 500,000 residents is Vermont with 10.4 with 625,000 residents, according to the Pew Center. VTDigger, an online nonprofit news organization that is also a member of the Institute for Nonprofit News, employs more than half of those reporters. In less than six years, VTDigger has grown from scratch to having an annual budget of about $1.1 million. It has offices next to the state house in Montpelier and employs 13 people as it grows yearly in sustainable revenue. It’s a model that has been very successful for a small startup. In New Hampshire with twice the population in a wealthier state with an enormous appetite for politics and government, InDepthNH.org will grow even faster because of VTDigger’s example and support. VTDigger’s founder Anne Galloway serves on our board of directors.

**FEWER REPORTERS:**    The number of full-time reporters in general appears to be down by more than one-half in New Hampshire and there have been no statewide startup news outlets to counter the losses. New Hampshire is one of only a handful of states that had no new non-profit news reporting ventures until InDepthNH.org. Elsewhere, the number of nonprofit news outlets is growing every day. The New Hampshire Union Leader, the state’s largest newspaper, once boasted upwards of 25 full-time reporters along with part-timers and correspondents. Today, there are eight full-timers and about the same number of part-timers and correspondents, although more of the editorial work has shifted to part-timers. Six years ago the Keene Sentinel newsroom employed 31 people, but now has only 24. When The Telegraph of Nashua closed its statehouse bureau last year, staff had reportedly been cut by a third under new owners who took over the year before.  About 3,800 people worked at traditional newspapers and a few small book publishers in New Hampshire in 2002. That dropped by more than half to 1,800 last year, according to the state Department of Employment Security, which doesn’t isolate news jobs in its tally.

**GOLDEN DAYS:** Yes, the Internet has increased the amount of news – or what today passes as news. This was the top international story on my computer news feed one recent morning: “Robot Kills Man at German Car Plant.” For national news, I learned that a woman who suffered from amnesia was finally identified. In New Hampshire, I discovered that many kind-hearted folks donated tools to replace the ones stolen from Habitat for Humanity. While these items indeed have some news value, they are not what the nation’s founders had in mind when they granted special protection to the freedom of the press in the U.S. and New Hampshire constitutions.  
 *The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution: 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.  
  
New Hampshire Constitution:****Article 8. [Accountability of Magistrates and Officers; Public’s Right to Know.]*** *All power residing originally in, and being derived from, the people, all the magistrates and officers of government are their substitutes and agents, and at all times accountable to them. Government, therefore, should be open, accessible, accountable and responsive. To that end, the public’s right of access to governmental proceedings and records shall not be unreasonably restricted.*

***Article 22. [Free Speech; Liberty of the Press.]*** *Free speech and liberty of the press are essential to the security of freedom in a state: They ought, therefore, to be inviolably preserved.*

I call them “kitty patty-cake” stories after my favorite online video that shows two cats arguing in English as they play a pretty rough game of patty cake. What is missing in New Hampshire? Stories like Roger Talbot’s in-depth coverage in the New Hampshire Sunday News that led to the indictment of the powerful probate judge John Fairbanks for stealing $1.8 million from clients. Fairbanks went on the lam for four years then committed suicide in a Las Vegas hotel room. In the meantime, Talbot tracked him to Canada and elsewhere and continued to investigate Fairbanks and those who helped him get away. Those were days when news outlets could afford to pay experienced reporters a living wage and a travel allowance to investigate important stories. Norma Love of the Associated Press changed the way some police and prosecutors handle rape cases because of her expose showing some turned a blind eye to victims. A national article I recently finished researching and writing shows what happens when prosecutors protect police discipline records over the rights of defendants to a fair trial. The story was sponsored by the Fund for Investigative Journalism.

<http://vtdigger.org/2015/07/19/evidence-of-police-dishonesty-leads-to-overturned-convictions-in-arizona-massachusetts/>

These are the kinds of stories that are expensive and time-consuming to produce. Because of the staff cuts, reporters rarely have time to do develop these kinds of stories anymore in New Hampshire. InDepthNH.org is working to change that.

**MARKET ANALYSIS:**  
 InDepthNH.org will succeed in New Hampshire because there is a dire need for watchdog reporting to augment legacy news coverage and a wealthy, well-educated population with a deep interest in public affairs to support it. Although there are far fewer reporters on the job today in New Hampshire because of deep staff cuts at newspapers around the state, the people haven’t lost their desire for hard news. Studies show that about 70 percent of adults read a newspaper in print or online in a typical week, with the mobile news and podcast audiences being the fastest growing. If 2 percent of New Hampshire households with an annual income of more than $200,000 (551) donated $50 a month as underwriters of InDepthNH.org, that would be $27,550 a month or $330,600 a year.   
  
NH Population: 1.3 million  
Percent high school graduates and beyond: 92 percent  
Homes with computers: 89 percent  
Total employed: 690,769 people  
Total private: 542,036 people  
Total government: 96,394  
Self-employed: 51,564  
Educational, healthcare, social services: 168,332  
Manufacturing: 90,367  
Retail: 88,947  
Professional, scientific, management: 69,701  
Arts, entertainment, recreation: 57,439  
Construction: 47,584  
Finance and insurance: 44,418  
Information: 14,110  
Total households: 518,245  
Mean household income: $82,935  
Median household income: $64,712, sixth in the nation  
Massachusetts household income: $64,859, fifth in nation  
Maine: $46,033, 32nd highest in nation  
Vermont: $52,766, 19th highest in nation  
Number of New Hampshire employers: 137, 815  
Notable events: First-in-the nation presidential primary, Highland Games, Hampton Beach Seafood Festival, League of New Hampshire Craftsmen’s Show, Prescott Park Arts Festival, New Hampshire Film Festival, Maple Sugaring; two nationally televised NASCAR races that attract 100,000-plus attendees, national entertainment acts at the Verizon Wireless Arena, Meadowbrook Performing Arts Center and Hampton Beach Casino Ballroom, Motorcycle weekend (the third-largest rally event in the U.S.

**DIRE NEED:**

      The need is clear. Strict word limits, story quotas and pressure to write sexy stories over substance because they require less reporter time have worn down journalists and readers. One reporter complained she felt compelled to cover simple stories that would generate more clicks than complex, challenging stories that would more meaningfully inform readers. As a veteran reporter with 30 years of experience, I work with news outlets, schools, colleges and the public to train journalists and inform news consumers as we build the staff at InDepthNH.org.  Struggling New Hampshire newspapers have been forced to rely heavily on free content emailed from police departments, government agencies and businesses to fill space. The pressure is on to make sure the mug shots run with each brief “because they get a lot of clicks.” News credibility will be stretched in the future by branded news. These are stories that look like news, but are really advertising. Even the New York Times is embracing this concept. The line between advertising and editorial is blurring like never before.  Facebook and Apple have both entered the news business. InDepthNH.org will remain old-school when it comes to ethics, but embrace new media as appropriate and as it evolves. We will speak (and tweet) truth to power, and push back hard on government that appears at times hell-bent on pushing its people out of the way.

         Government agencies have become extremely adept in New Hampshire at orchestrating the news conversation. With so few reporters, people in power often determine which stories are covered and even how those stories are told, starting with a press release. It’s a standing joke in the news business that such press releases often arrive late Friday afternoons, just before the officials leave for the weekend if they want to be unavailable for comment. And we now have a President who disdains the nation’s great newspapers and takes to Twitter instead. In New Hampshire, when officials refuse to release information that is public by law, there is very little push back from news organizations. Years ago, the Union Leader, Keene Sentinel, Nashua Telegraph and the Concord Monitor – among others - would routinely go to court to fight for public information. Superior Court is the only recourse to fight right-to-know violations in New Hampshire.  For the last decade, newspapers have become increasingly reluctant to take on expensive legal battles. State agencies and corporations are more often sealing court records that generally would be considered public because they know publishers are unlikely to fight back. “We have to really pick our fights,” one news executive told me.  
        InDepthNH.org is partnering with First Amendment lawyers seeking new models with which to challenge government secrecy. I believe as Thomas Jefferson did that an informed citizenry can achieve great things. We must do our part as journalists to fulfill the dream of democracy. Nonprofit news outlets like InDepthNH.org are stepping in to fill the void across the U.S. and continue the important work of reporting the news during a tumultuous time in media history.

**DEMOCRACY MATTERS:**

         What happens to government when the press isn’t watching? Or when there are too few reporters to investigate beyond a press release?  
          Democracy is threatened. It is that simple.  
          To counter that threat, nonprofit news organizations like InDepthNH.org are taking on the important role of government watchdog across the country. The Institute for Nonprofit News (formerly Investigative News Network) was founded seven years ago helping large and small outlets fulfill their mission. It started with 27 members and now boasts more than 130. As a member, InDepthNH.org has access to training and advice from INN’s experts who teach best practices and help build sustainable nonprofit businesses from startups to well-known members such as Center for Public Integrity and ProPublica.

      Our mission at InDepthNH.org is to report honest, accurate and fair news without fear or favor that will help readers fully understand and participate in their government and community.  Jefferson said it in any number of famous quotes, but this one sums it up best for me:  
         “Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government; that whenever things get so far wrong as to attract their notice, they may be relied on to set them to rights."

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