

**EDITOR'S NOTE: Senator Cardin writes periodic columns for Maryland publications. The following column about the newspaper industry may be of interest to your readers. Please contact Susan Sullam at [susan\\_sullam@cardin.senate.gov](mailto:susan_sullam@cardin.senate.gov) if you have any questions.**

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*PRECEDE: Senator Cardin is a member of five Senate committees: Foreign Relations, Judiciary, Environment and Public Works, Budget, and Small Business and Entrepreneurship. His web site is: [cardin.senate.gov](http://cardin.senate.gov). He also can be found at [YouTube.com/SenatorCardin](http://YouTube.com/SenatorCardin)*

## **SAVING A FREE PRESS COULD HELP PRESERVE OUR DEMOCRACY**

By U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin

In recent months, the newspaper industry has been turned upside down. The Seattle Post-Intelligencer, the Rocky Mountain News, the Baltimore Examiner and the San Francisco Chronicle, among others, have ceased daily publication or announced they may have to stop publishing. The Tribune Company, owners of The Baltimore Sun, has filed for bankruptcy.

This does not bode well for our democracy. We are dependent on an open and free press to monitor what happens in our communities so that as Americans we can make reasoned, sound judgments about our leaders. I think Thomas Jefferson, a man who was vilified by newspapers daily, summed it up best when he said: "If I had to choose between government without newspapers, and newspapers without government, I wouldn't hesitate to choose the latter."

Like Jefferson, I believe that a well-informed public is the core of our democracy. How can we forget Watergate, ENRON, AIG? News stories, uncovered by journalists, often bring to public attention the most important decisions and actions that affect all of us.

For that reason, I have introduced *The Newspaper Revitalization Act*, to help our disappearing community and metropolitan papers by allowing them to become non-profit organizations. My bill would allow newspapers – if they choose – to operate under 501(c)(3) status for educational purposes, similar to public broadcasting. Under this arrangement, newspapers would not be allowed to make political endorsements, but would be allowed to freely report on all issues, including political campaigns. Advertising and subscription revenue would be tax exempt and contributions to support coverage or operations could be tax deductible.

The measure is targeted to preserve local newspapers serving communities and not large newspaper conglomerates. This measure is not a "bailout" of the newspaper industry and involves no infusion of federal funds. In fact, because newspaper profits have been falling in recent years, no substantial loss of federal revenue is expected.

We are losing our newspaper industry. While the economy has caused an immediate problem, the business model for newspapers, based on circulation and advertising revenue, is broken, and that is a real tragedy for communities across the nation and for our democracy.

While Americans have access to many news sources, we rely on newspapers for in-depth reporting that follows important issues, records events and exposes misdeeds. In fact, most if not all sources of journalistic information – from radio to television to the Internet – gather their news from newspaper reporters who cover the news on a daily basis and know their communities. It is in the interest of our nation and good governance that we ensure newspapers survive.

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