

OPINION

OUR VIEW

A needed balance

Freedom of the press isn't about this institution's right to know. It's about the rights of you — our readers and the citizens of this nation — and your ability to access information about the government.

Legislation known as the Free Flow of Information Act of 2013 offered by a group of U.S. senators seeks a common-sense balance between the public's interest in freedom of the press and public safety.

The bipartisan "gang" of senators who have proposed the bill includes Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., a daughter of a longtime Star Tribune reporter and columnist.

Clearly, Klobuchar understands the need for freedom of the press. She learned it at the knee of her father, Jim. But there are times when that freedom may come with a cost, and in recent situations that involves disclosure of classified information that some believe could potentially harm national security and public safety.

The proposed bill would support increased media protection that would codify into law and expand upon the recently announced U.S. Department of Justice media guidelines.

In addition to supporting the original legislation that offers legal protections to journalists engaged in newsgathering activities, the gang also said in a

statement that they would seek to prevent future administrations from reversing the department's guidelines by including them in legislation that would make them the law of the land.

Klobuchar said the department's guidelines are a good start to improving protections for the media. But also said there is a need to make sure that the guidelines can be reversed.

"This legisaltion will help ensure the right to a free press without hindering law enforcement's ability to protect national security and public safety," she said.

The bill would protect journalists and their organizations from being forced to reveal information, such as the identity of sources who have been promised confidentiality and in the course of carrying out newsgathering functions.

And while it would not give absolute privilege to journalists, it would establish a legal framework to determine the limited circumstances under which such protected information can be ordered to be disclosed by a court.

The bill is likely to face questions and possibly criticism when it goes before the Senate Judiciary Committee, but we believe this gang is on track to strike a needed balance between freedom of the press and the need for public safety.



A new face in a new place

Hello International Falls!

I'm Spenser Bickett, and I've just joined the staff over here at The Journal as a reporter. I come to you from...all over, really. I was raised in Eagan, Minn., but also lived for a time in Apple Valley, Richfield, Bloomington, and St. Louis Park. You could say I'm well-versed in the highway system of the Twin Cities, which of course does nothing for me up here.

I'm coming up here because I graduated in May 2012 from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire with a degree in journalism, and I was hunting for a job for more than a year before finally finding this one. I couldn't be more excited to join the team up here and learn how things work in a small town like this one. I've known since I was a kid that this is what I want to do for a living, and I'm looking forward to starting my career here. There's a lot of good, helpful people over here at The Journal who will give me the guidance and help I need to become a better journalist.

The biggest difference between International Falls and the Twin Cities I've seen in the four whole days I've been up here has got to be the traffic. For one, it only takes about eight minutes to drive across town, which makes for the least stressful commute I've ever had. It sure beats 45 minutes in stop-and-go traffic on the way home from work, and less stress at the end of the day is always a good



Spenser BICKETT

STAFF WRITER

thing.

I can already see one of my bigger adjustments is going to be acclimating myself to the outdoors culture. My family has never been big hunting/fishing/camping/you name it aficionados, so I haven't had those experiences. However, I'm already becoming entranced by the scenery and would love to start doing those things. A friend helped me find a beginner fishing pole before I left, so there's a start! I also would like to try snowshoeing once the snow starts falling, which from everything I've heard, should be shortly after Labor Day.

Another difference I've noticed between the Twin Cities and here is the sense of community is so much stronger here. Everyone is more friendly and helpful, and there's a real feeling of safety and fellowship that I've never experienced in the Twin Cities. So far it's been great, and made meeting new people a breeze. It's an

atmosphere I've seen on TV or in movies, or read about in books before, but it's another thing to experience and feel it firsthand, and it's a wonderful thing.

As far as what I do when I'm not chasing down leads and interviewing sources here at the paper, I like to stay active. You'll probably see me running around town some days, or just out on a walk enjoying the scenery and the trails. I like to play basketball whenever I can, so if you know of a good pick-up game, let me know. I enjoy reading new books, watching sports on TV, or finding new movies or TV shows on Netflix. I recently bought my first motorcycle, and I'm excited to get out on the picturesque roads here and ride. I'm looking forward to the slower pace here, where I can have more time to enjoy these things.

I've been polishing my journalism skills in the past year with an unpaid internship with Sun Newspapers in the Twin Cities. I did many feature stories there, where I went out and got to meet and talk to people I normally wouldn't get to know. This experience hammered home the idea that everyone has a story to tell, and it's my job as a journalist to go out and tell it. It's one of the joys of this job, being able to learn at least one new thing everyday. I'm looking forward to meeting as many of you as I can and hearing your stories.

How to contact your lawmakers

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Letters should be limited to 500 words or less. Longer letters may be edited. Letters must be signed and include the telephone number and address of the letter writer. Only the author's city address will be published.

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