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Extended Producer Responsibility Act would have unintended consequences for newspaper and magazine readers | Opinion

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Published 1:23 p.m. ET Feb. 11, 2021

New York State's history is also the history of newspapers and magazines, from the earliest single page colonial broadsheets of the 1600s to trend-spotting magazines about modern life in the world's most exciting city. Publications of all varieties have flourished in New York primarily because its citizens and their government have fostered a climate of openness and encouragement. American laws protecting freedom of the press date back to Alexander Hamilton's influence on New York State government.

New York newspapers and magazines reach every corner of a state that includes dense city neighborhoods, hamlets in forever-wild forests and small family farms set miles apart on dirt roads. Although publications have added digital editions, publications printed on paper are delivered to tens of thousands of homes that lack broadband internet and homes where readers simply are more comfortable with the familiar format of paper or want to keep their magazines to reference stories on travel, food or projects.

Over the decades, paper production has changed dramatically. Newsprint — the paper on which newspapers is printed — is compostable and biodegradable, and ink used in newspapers and magazines is now made from non-toxic organic materials such as soy and linseed oil. Newspapers have shrunk in size to save paper and both magazines and newspapers have adopted practices which recoup waste material at the printing plant. Paper is composed of a renewable resource. Newspapers are safe enough to be used as vegetable garden mulch and can be remanufactured into home insulation.

When newspapers and magazines are placed into the recycling stream by consumers, they are readily reincorporated into new products. The EPA's November 2020 recycling report shows a recycling rate of 8.5 percent for plastics, 17.2% for aluminum, 18.2% for rubber and leather,

25% for glass and 68.2% for paper. Approximately 80 percent of U.S. paper mills reincorporate post-consumer paper products into packaging, tissues, and printed paper (nearly all newsprint is currently manufactured in Canada). The market for recycled paper is expected to increase as North American manufacturers pick up capacity following the exit of China from the market for recyclables.

The recyclability of paper products is hampered by one thing – cross contamination with other materials either through consumer error or post-consumer handling practices. These problems are beyond the control of publishers.

A well-intentioned but misguided piece of legislation in the New York State Senate, S.1185-A, the Extended Producer Responsibility Act, would unfairly impose the costs of inadequate recycling efforts involving higher and growing levels of plastic material upon newspapers and magazines, even though our products are highly reusable, recyclable and eco-friendly.

Further, the legislation would require newspapers and magazines to absorb these new government-imposed fees at a time when economic conditions and the COVID-19 pandemic have caused advertising revenues to drop precipitously. The legislation could force publications to save money by eliminating home delivery to rural areas that are expensive to reach, and perhaps to cut costs by cutting journalism jobs.

Accurate news of current events is vital to American civic life, and legislation which imposes financial hardship on newspapers and magazines further erodes citizen access to factual and trusted news and information. Furthermore, newspapers are the sole source of local news for many communities throughout the state. Coverage of town board meetings, food pantry hours and locations, fund drives by volunteer fire departments, classified ads selling used cars and menu specials at local diners are the lifeblood of community newspapers. Yet this legislation discriminates against news and information published on paper, as opposed to information that is circulated on social media and other digital formats.

We urge the New York State Legislature to consider the impact of this legislation and find more appropriate ways to reclaim post-consumer waste without disadvantaging the state's vital news and information sources.

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