

The Delray Democrat

A Free Press Is Vital¹

June S. Neal²

Congratulations to your editorial boards' well-argued opposition to House Bill 757 (["Florida anti-free speech bill would chill robust debate," March 6](#)).

In 1679, Benjamin Harris, journalism's first bad boy, ran into trouble with British government officials for his criticism — of them. He took off for Boston and published "Publick Occurrences, Both Foreign and Domestick," but the colonial leaders "were not amused by his insinuations of incest in the French royal family." They said publishers must obtain a license to write — from the very officials they were covering.

Thus, the first instance of government interference in America's news business.

Mainstream newspapers already apply many protections against errors by publicly correcting mistakes and offering space for opinions and letters to the editor. They don't have to.

In 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against a candidate for the Florida House of Representatives who demanded space equal to the paper's criticism of him.

Such restrictions eliminate a newspaper's editorial discretion, essential to the life of a free press. That's why in 1987, the Federal Communications Commission repealed the Fairness Doctrine, the "equal time law." It was President Ronald Reagan, himself the target of much media censure, who vetoed Congress's attempt to retain the law.

It's either a free press or propaganda.

June S. Neal, *Orlando Sentinel*, March 10, 2024

¹ [The Delray Democrat](#), February-March 2024, page 9.

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