
Guest Opinion: AB 5 can be a newspaper killer

September 10, 2019

“The job is yours, son.” I couldn’t believe it; it was my first job. I was going to be a businessman at the age of 12.

I was being hired by the San Francisco Chronicle to have my own newspaper route. Every morning, I would get up before 6:00, get my papers from the delivery truck on the corner, get on my bicycle and deliver 125 newspapers to my customers.

At the end of the month, I had to collect from each of my customers and keep careful count of the money. As a young person, I was learning what it was like to be in business for oneself.

Many years later, when I bought radio station KPLY AM - later turned into KCRE - from Mason Deaver, he was able to supplement his retirement income by delivering The Triplicate and the Times Standard to his customers.

We were not alone in creating our own businesses. Today, thousands of kids, single mothers, retirees and others looking for extra money supplement their income by delivering newspapers.

Sadly, if the State of California has its way, all of this is will vanish. AB 5, by Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzales of San Diego, would treat newspaper carriers as employees rather than independent contractors. As employees, they would get employee benefits like health care, retirement, sick leave, etc., benefits that are extremely costly to their employer.

It’s no secret that thousands of newspapers have gone bankrupt, or just ceased publishing, because they could no longer absorb their increased costs. Let’s face it, we almost lost The Triplicate.

Some businesses have already been exempted from this law, such as doctors, investment advisors and real estate agents. But not newspaper carriers.

In a recent editorial, the Santa Rosa Press Democrat said, “Failure to exempt newspaper carriers - who have been recognized by the state as independent contractors since 1987 - could force some publications to scrap their print editions and rely solely on online publishing.”

This bill already has passed the Assembly and is headed to the Senate, where it has an excellent chance of passing. If this bill passes and is signed by the governor, it could mean the end of many more newspapers.

If you want to ensure the continued existence of our local newspaper, please call Sen. Mike McGuire and ask him to vote NO on AB 5.

Bob Berkowitz

Bob Berkowitz is a member of the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors. The opinions expressed are his and do not reflect the opinion of this newspaper or the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors.