

## BEYOND THE SLEAZE

*By Shannon Warren for The Journal Record, March 28, 2016*

Sick of campaign rhetoric? Trying to decide which candidate to vote against rather than support? Are you frustrated by the bombardment of a disproportionate focus on candidates who make provocative statements, no matter how unreasonable or untruthful?

It seems as if the more outrageous the comment, the more air time is given. To date, presidential hopefuls have racked up billions of dollars in free television coverage. Since ratings are proportional to viewer interest, could greed be driving certain sectors of the broadcast media? The *Christian Science Monitor* recently reported a quote by CBS Chairman Les Moonves who indicated he was pleased with a certain candidate's participation in the election because "the money is rolling in."

The *Monitor* further quoted Moonves as saying, "It may not be good for America, but it's [darn] good for CBS." One might conclude from that statement that profits are valued over principles. But, even if papers such as the *Monitor* are trying to do their jobs as responsible journalists by exposing these dilemmas, is anyone paying attention?

According to a January report by the Pew Research Center, Americans distrust of partisan politics is going well beyond the issues. They don't even "stomach each other's news sources... It's as if they belong not to rival parties but alien tribes."

Pew reports that conservatives rely heavily on Fox News, whereas moderates and liberals listen to a mix of broadcast news with about 20% of them watching CNN. NPR reported that many voters are turned off by the partisan arguments and 39% are now identifying themselves as independents. What greatly concerns me are the people who are so fed up with the negativity of the campaigns that they don't believe their vote will make any difference.

Finding comfort in ideals that reinforce our own perspective is a human tendency, but if we completely shut out facts or differing viewpoints, we cannot thoroughly evaluate the issues. We have to rise above the noise, realizing that most journalists are earnestly doing their jobs in protecting the public's interest by reporting the facts and various opinions. It's up to us as voters to diligently seek reliable sources by discerning what is really news vs. hogwash. That involves digging past the sleaze to find the truth, even if we disagree with it. A challenging process, but our democracy depends on it.

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