

them to multiple perspectives. I am old enough to remember a time when we had morning, afternoon, and evening editions of the big-city papers. There was plenty to read and journalists had the time to go deep into issues and cover many different national and local topics. The first step for having an educated electorate is information, and the newspapers were the primary means of information.

Yes, the internet, TV, and radio provide more information, but that information tends to be narrowly focused. The scope is limited in alternative views, perspective, and focus. Is more information better if all that is consumed by an individual is one-sided? Streams of disconnected, sometimes unfounded information and opinion do not provide the visibility and information we need to efficiently manage our government.

I don't fault the media for any of this change. They are not a public service, but a business entity attempting to make a profit. In a crowded and fragmented market, survival is a function of succeeding in defined niches where loyalty can be established. If people are not willing to pay for the value of investigative journalism, then why should businesses invest resources in helping to keep our government open and honest?

The First Amendment includes the right of freedom of the press. So, what is our government's responsibility to protect this right? The press or media is a business, not an arm of government. All our government should do is help assure a level playing field. What the press is will change over time. Fewer people rely on TV and news networks, but it can be argued that the monopolization of any media source (e.g., Fox or Sinclair in TV) has slanted the playing field. Anti-trust laws are not to create competing businesses but to prevent massive clumping in an area that significantly tips the playing field.

I have found the following thought experiment helpful for showing how this single-perspective situation prevents us from productive dialogue. I hope you and your kids have had the fun of playing with Play-Doh at some point. Play-Doh is just a blob of stuff that has to be formed. When Play-Doh is taken out of the can and dumped on a table, what is it? Well, it's Play-Doh. Now let's assume the clump of

Play-Doh represents a problem, issue, question, or anything else our society needs to address. In our democratic society, we use our political process to take action on the problem. The Play-Doh represents the problem or challenge and not just a toy to occupy our time.

If we are sitting around the table with Play-Doh (i.e., an issue) in front of us, we can have a rational discussion about it, share ideas and develop a course of action. However, something happens to that Play-Doh. Take the room of people, separate that same color Play-Doh, and put an equal number of people around three tables. Some of the Play-Doh kits come with plastic molds that help you form shapes with the Play-Doh. One table had the Play-Doh first go through a square, another a circle, and the last a star mold before it hit the table. Each table looks at a different shape.

If you ask the people at each table what they are looking at, the majority are going to tell you they are looking at a square, circle, or star. Some may say “shaped Play-Doh,” but the emphasis will most likely be on the shape, not the Play-Doh. Our media are the molds that shape the issues and strongly influence what we perceive. All three are looking at the same Play-Doh or issue, but their perspective is based on which filter or mold they are looking through. If you bring the groups together, one will be talking about a circle, one about a square, and one about a star, so the shape—their ideology—becomes dominant, not the common problem.

If we are going to work together and find solutions to our problems, we have to take what the media gives us, squish it back into a blob of the original Play-Doh, then start to figure out what to do. Informed discussion and debate is the process that helps us forget about the shape and focus on what the problem is—Play-Doh—rather than a shape.

1.3. Boundary Condition: New Ideas and Opinions

The Founding Fathers assumed that if you had new ideas or wanted to get your point across, you could post a few flyers on the oak tree at the town common and print some pamphlets, and your ideas would get disseminated and discussed at local taverns. Back then,