



**MEDIA TRUST & DEMOCRACY**

**THE CASPER  
PROJECT**

**Conducted by  
Rod Hicks**

**Presented  
September 7, 2019**

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**THE CASPER  
PROJECT**

A six-month project of the Society of Professional Journalists and Society of Professional Journalists Foundation conducted February-July, 2019, in Casper, Wyoming.

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# Summary

For six months, a small group of residents in Casper, Wyoming, set aside two hours every few Tuesdays to join a discussion about the press. They were participants in a project that sought to understand what people want from the news media, explain how journalism is practiced and identify the disconnect that fostered four decades of dwindling trust in the news media.

The project began February 12, 2019 with an open discussion on problems with the press and ended July 16 with a panel of national journalists answering questions at a forum open to anyone in Casper who wanted to attend. The sessions in between included a presentation on distinguishing news from other types of information, another on identifying news media bias, and a panel of local journalists.

Conservative participants wanted to know why the press is biased against President Donald Trump and conservative values. Liberals wanted to know why certain communities rarely show up in press coverage and why “Christian white

men” continue to have the greatest influence in shaping stories. People on both sides of the political divide did not like unnamed sources in stories and believed news operations give priority to getting breaking news stories on the air rather than getting them right.

The discussions, tense at times, often left members frustrated as they listened to fellow participants express positions different than their own. They complained about politicians calling Christians Easter worshippers, spoke up on behalf of transgender black women, marginalized middle-aged white men and constantly defended a president some members despised. One conservative member quit, another got into a back-and-forth with a presenter. An audience member at the open forum hurled obscenities at a panelist over his comments about Trump.

The study was not scientific. Participants made no significant changes in their news consumption habits or their level of trust in the news media after participating. But there was tremendous value in hearing participants honestly and

passionately express their thoughts about the news media. Most said they enjoyed the sessions and learned a lot.

## The project makes five recommendations for news organizations:

- **ENGAGE:** Meet with your readers, listeners or viewers regularly to see what stories they’re interested in and to get feedback on coverage.
- **EDUCATE:** Explain how your news organization works and how journalists do their jobs, including how they confirm their reporting is accurate.
- **SEEK OUT BIAS:** Consider ways to make opinion more distinct from news. Make sure reporters who go on TV news shows know how to avoid getting drawn into giving their own opinion.
- **BE TRANSPARENT:** Tell your audience the motivation behind controversial decisions.
- **CREATE YOUR OWN CASPER PROJECT:** Tailor it to your audience, adding or removing sessions as appropriate. Set a schedule that fits your time and budget.



Carl Oleson and Dee Lundberg listen to comments of fellow Casper Project participants.

Photo by Elysia Conner/Casper Star-Tribune

# Overview

The Society of Professional Journalists and SPJ Foundation conducted a six-month project in Casper, Wyoming, during the first half of 2019 to examine trust in the media with residents living in the state where distrust is highest. Through two-hour gatherings held every few weeks, the project sought to learn what citizens want from the press and their perceptions of how journalism is practiced in the United States. It wanted to understand participants' thoughts about the relationship between democracy and the press in an evolving U.S. media environment while giving them guidance on how to sort through the confusing media landscape to find news content that is verified, independent and accountable.

The goal was to help skeptical news consumers better understand the process of gathering and disseminating news, expose them to local and national journalists who might have a hand in shaping the news they receive and listen to their grievances about the press with the hope of finding ways news organizations might address them. The project also wanted to determine whether exposing participants to these activities would produce any changes in their trust of the press.

If deemed successful, the program could serve as a model to be used in other areas across the country, conducted by local groups.



The Society of Professional Journalists Foundation voted in 2017 to hire a staff person to address the decadeslong issue of dwindling trust in news organizations. The primary focus for the new “Journalist on Call” would be outreach to the public — finding ways to engage news consumers in substantive discussions about the reasons behind their distrust while helping them understand how journalists go about doing their jobs and the important role of the press in a democracy. The Journalist on Call would be somewhat of an ombudsman, bridging the gap between the public and the press, helping news outlets understand why they’re mistrusted and what changes they might try to win back people who had abandoned them.

Rod Hicks, hired in July 2018 as the first Journalist on Call, captured nearly all the objectives of the position in the project launched in February 2019: “Media Trust & Democracy: The Casper Project.” He made six trips to Casper, ranging from five to 11 days, to get to know the town and its residents and to conduct sessions for the project. He met with about 25 residents roughly every six weeks for conversations and presentations about the news media.

Hicks had wanted the project to include 75-100 Casper residents, but was unable to recruit that many. To measure impact, participants would be given a questionnaire prior to the first session seeking information about the media they consumed and their level of trust in the press. They would be asked the same questions a few months later when the project concluded to see if there were any measurable changes. As constructed, the project could not be considered scientific, and it never was intended as such. There were no controls in place, for instance, to determine whether any changes in participants’ news consumption habits or trust in the press were directly attributable to their involvement in the project. They also self-selected for participation, which a scientific study would want to avoid.

Nonetheless, there is much value — both to participants and the journalism industry — in putting news consumers and journalism professionals in the same space to work through issues that separate them. Much still can be learned from those who participated and, importantly, from observations of the exercise overall. The structure used sets the study apart from others. SPJ went into a community far away from the East Coast news capitals to listen to people who felt overlooked by media companies that proudly brag about the reach of their journalistic work. These were people who had little chance of seeing themselves or their community reflected in national media.

It was an exercise that brought together people to interact with each other and journalism professionals — both local and national, academicians and practitioners. Residents were able to vent. They were able to debate. They were able to learn. They got answers about the motives of journalists, why certain stories are pursued by some news organizations and others not, why stories on some topics appear almost daily, despite little interest by some people and their wide circles of relatives, neighbors, worshippers and colleagues. And all of this unfolded in front of people with the ability to make changes or the means to relay the concerns to newsroom managers.

Presenter Howard Schneider advocated that any future sessions also be done in person.

“As tempting as it is to argue that we can use the web to scale presentations, I think face-to-face dialogue is crucial,” Schneider said. “I think the value of these sessions is for journalists and news consumers to learn from each other.”



Rod Hicks, SPJ's Journalist on Call

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The Journalist on Call would be somewhat of an ombudsman, bridging the gap between the public and the press, helping news outlets understand why they’re mistrusted and what changes they might try to win back people who had abandoned them.

# Development of project

Hicks wanted to use the project to probe the underlying reasons people distrust the news media while helping them understand all the work that goes into producing stories. He had just come off 33 years of working in seven newsrooms across the South, Midwest and Northeast. In each newsroom, he and his colleagues verified information before it was published, sought to speak to the most relevant stakeholders and identified for readers the evidence that supported the reporting.

Journalists he worked with took it hard whenever they made mistakes, which typically were promptly corrected. There were times when errors were not properly addressed, but there was no malicious intent on the part of the journalists. Carelessness was most often the reason. There were no mandates to pursue stories that conformed to the political or social agenda of the publisher or owners. Everyone was just trying to tell stories that resonated within the communities as accurately and fairly as possible.

But many of the people the stories were written for apparently did not see it that way. Distrust of the press predates Hicks' entrance into the business three decades ago and the election of President Donald Trump in 2016. Americans' trust in the news media began a steady decline in the mid-70s, when it was at its highest amid the Watergate scandal. In 1976, nearly 70 percent of Americans said they had a great deal or fair amount of trust in the media to report the news "fully, accurately and fairly," according to Gallup. The polling agency, in [survey results released in October 2018](#), found that 45 percent of Americans had a great deal or fair amount of trust in the media. That number was lowest, at 32 percent, in 2016.

It's easy to dismiss complaints about the press as illegitimate, especially if you and colleagues in your sphere work hard on behalf of the public to adhere to the highest journalistic standards. Even if everyone practicing journalism today is doing so at



Rod Hicks, left, discusses the Casper Project with Casper Star-Tribune Editor Joshua Wolfson (center) and Publisher Dale Bohren.

Photo by Sean Johnson

the highest possible level, does that mean the scores of people who criticize the work being produced are wrong?

"There are a lot of irresponsible things done in the name of journalism," said Joy Mayer, director of Trusting News, which helps news organizations better connect with their audiences. "I get frustrated. I question journalists' ethics. It is reasonable to have complaints about journalism."

The inability of a person to cite specific examples of problems they perceive with the press does not invalidate their complaints, Mayer said. That puts the onus on the news consumer too much. Conservatives make a valid point when they say they hear a constant stream of accusations about Trump, and they also don't see themselves reflected in the news, she said.

"The industry is not effectively addressing what it means that there is a lack of political diversity in the newsroom," Mayer said.

Hicks reached out to others with experience attempting to demystify journalism for the public as he crafted programming for the project. Those he received input from include Howard Schneider, executive director of the Center for News Literacy at

## AMERICAN'S TRUST IN NEWS MEDIA

The High: 1976

# 70%

The percent of Americans who said they had a great deal or fair amount of trust in the media to report the news "fully, accurately and fairly."

The Low: 2016

# 32%

The percent of Americans who had great deal or fair amount of trust in the media.

Source: Gallup

Stony Brook University and Dan Gillmor, a digital media literacy professor at Arizona State University and director of News Co/Lab, an initiative to elevate news literacy.

Hicks wanted programming that would help him understand what citizens want from the press and their perceptions of how journalism is practiced in the United States. He wanted participants to ask questions of journalists and hear them explain how they do their jobs, including the steps they take to make sure their work meets high journalistic standards. He wanted them to walk inside newsrooms and observe journalists in action. He also wanted them to leave the project more skillful at sorting through today's confusing media landscape — particularly online — and distinguishing news from propaganda, commentary and other types of information. In short, he hoped the more people knew about how journalism is practiced, with all its safeguards and verification processes, the more likely they would trust journalists' work.

Hicks had hoped the project would include a professional survey that took a deeper look at Casper and Wyoming residents and their views on media trustworthiness. He had conversations with Gallup and, for a brief time, thought a partnership would surface. But that did not happen. He then began conversations with the Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center at the University of Wyoming. While the agency showed interest in the project, it was unable to donate its services, and the cost, while not excessive, was more than the budget for the project could accommodate. The university did, however, give feedback on the project in the early stages.

That left the project without a scientific component, but the core of the project was not scientific anyway. It provided a forum for community members — some with opposing views on controversial topics — and journalism professionals to all come together to learn from each other.

## Participants profile

A variety of people were enlisted to help solicit participants for the project, and the *Casper Star-Tribune* ran a column about media trust that ended with a plug for the project. Most participants learned about the project from that column. The study was intended for people who have some skepticism about the news they receive but ended up with a mix of people with various views of the press, including some who were extremely distrustful. Others had different complaints: too many inaccurate details, important stories being overlooked, most stories being told from a white male point of view.

The participant roster stood at 36 names, and attendance at sessions ranged from 19 to 28. Eleven people attended all five sessions, and seven attended just one.

## Wolfson: Building back trust in the media

Joshua Wolfson 307-266-0575, Josh.Wolfson@trib.com Jan 26, 2019

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MORE INFORMATION



Several national journalists to sit on media trust panel Tuesday in Casper

A handful of editors from prominent national media outlets will sit on a panel on media trust next week in Casper, the final event in a broad...

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It's usually the first question people ask me these days.

Whether I'm visiting relatives, taking a vacation or mingling at an event, it's the thing people want to know when they learn I'm a newspaper editor: How do you deal with all the comments these days about fake news?

I don't have a satisfying answer. I explain that the caricature offered by media critics, politicians, and most notably, our president, is inaccurate, unfair and counter to everything I've experienced in my nearly two decades as a professional journalist. I note how the reporters in my newsroom, and our colleagues at other news organizations, work hard to produce accurate, fair and complete stories. I share how I've seen journalists go out of their way to do the right thing, even when the right thing is also the most difficult thing. I point out that the code of ethics my colleagues and I live by is sacred to us, something that we've based our entire professional lives around.

And, unfortunately, that seems to matter less and less to some people.

We live in an era of polarization, an era where trust in institutions — from Congress and the White House to the media — is at a low. It's a time when, if people don't like what we have to say, they denounce our work as fake news — without even reading it.

This is more than unfortunate. I believe it represents a crisis in our democracy. There is a reason the Founding Fathers protected the freedom of the press: An informed public is essential if our country is to succeed. So what to do when many people don't trust the media enough to read about what is happening in their community, in their state, in their country?

The Society of Professional Journalists wants to find some answers. The group, which represents journalists from across the country, plans to spend the next six months in Casper, examining why people don't trust the media and what can be done about it. They'll be holding a series of discussions and presentations to better understand the rising skepticism and to learn how to help people distinguish between news from propaganda, satire and outright lies.

The group is looking for roughly 75 people to participate in the project. These participants will attend two-hour sessions, once a month from February through July, on the topic of media trust. They'll be paid for their time, but perhaps just as importantly, they'll be able to share their concerns, their frustrations and their opinions along the way.

Does this sound like something you'd be interested in? If so, I'd encourage you to send an email to [casperproject@spj.org](mailto:casperproject@spj.org). Because the path we're on isn't a healthy one. People need journalists to provide the news that allows them to make informed decisions. And to do that, we need to build back the trust that has been lost.

Screen capture of the Casper Star-Tribune column about media trust that included a mention of SPJ seeking participants for the Casper Project.





Casper Star-Tribune Photos

# Why Casper

The Casper Project arose from a line in the job posting for the Journalist on Call position about starting a “pilot project ... in a single community where low levels of trust in the local news media exists.” Hicks would be responsible for adding meat to such a lean idea. He started by selecting the community among the 35,000 cities and towns and scores of unincorporated areas across the United States. He soon found a Gallup/Knight Foundation survey released in January 2018 that identified states with the highest and lowest levels of media distrust.



For its [“American Views: Trust, Media and Democracy”](#) survey, Gallup used a statistical modeling technique to analyze survey data, along with known demographic characteristics of state populations, which allowed it to generate estimates of trust scores on a 0-to-100 scale for all 50 states. Generally, the media trust estimates did not vary much by state, according to Gallup, but tended to be below the national average in states that are Republican-leaning with small minority populations. Conversely, states that lean Democratic or have larger minority populations tended to be above the national average in their estimated trust of mass media.

Wyoming had the lowest media trust score. It is a bright red state with entrenched support for President Donald Trump, who has frequently expressed skepticism about the accuracy and fairness of coverage of his administration by the mainstream press. None of the four other states identified by Gallup as having below-average trust in the press gave Trump as high a level of support as Wyoming. In the 2016 presidential race, Trump won all but one of the state’s 23 counties, 18 of them with 70 percent of the vote or more.

## CASPER DREW HICKS’ ATTENTION FOR SEVERAL REASONS:

- Casper has about 57,000 residents, making it the second-largest city in the state (behind Cheyenne), proving a good pool from which to draw participants. ► About 70 percent of cities and towns in Wyoming have populations less than 2,000.
- The city also is home to several local news sources, including the *Casper Star-Tribune*, the largest newspaper in the state and the only one published seven days a week. ► Having a variety of news outlets increased the potential for partnerships with media companies.

## MASS MEDIA TRUST SCORES, BY STATE

### Lowest

1. Wyoming (25)
2. Nebraska (27)
3. Utah (27)
4. North Dakota (28)
5. Idaho (28)

### Highest

1. Hawaii (44)
2. Alaska (43)
3. California (42)
4. Massachusetts (42)
5. Maryland (41)
5. New Jersey (41)

Source: Gallup

## CASPER RACIAL COMPOSITION

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s most recent American Community Survey, the [racial composition](#) of Casper was:

White:	92.68%
Two or more races:	2.89%
Black or African American:	1.73%
Native American:	1.01%
Other race:	0.96%
Asian:	0.73%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander:	0.01%



Rod Hicks listens to a participant while facilitating a discussion during the first session of the Casper Project.

Photo by Elysia Conner/Casper Star-Tribune

## The sessions

Participants were encouraged to actively participate in the session discussions and provide examples of stories or coverage that reinforced their skepticism of the news media. They were strongly urged to attend all five sessions and given a modest \$20 stipend at the end of each gathering. Beverages and light snacks were served at the first four.

In addition, participants were encouraged to take advantage of two newsroom tours organized for them in April, one at the *Casper Star-Tribune*, the other at KTWO-TV. There also was a makeup session in March for any new group members or those who could not make Session 1.

The sessions were held on the campus of Casper College, the first four in a room in the Gateway building with a capacity of 150. The last session, which featured the national journalists and a former governor and was open to the public, was held in Krampert Theatre, which seats more than 350 people.

As a safety precaution, Casper College stationed four uniformed security officers, all former police officers, inside the theater and increased patrols near the building the night of the public forum. In addition, SPJ hired an armed, uniformed officer from the Casper Police Department to monitor the auditorium.

### NUMBER OF SESSIONS: 5

- **Feb. 12** — Facilitated discussion on participants' views about the trustworthiness of the press.
- **March 15** — Presentation on distinguishing news from other types of information.
- **May 7** — Presentation on understanding what news bias is and what it isn't.
- **June 4** — Panel discussion with journalists based in Casper.
- **July 16** — Panel discussion with newsroom managers from *The Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, Associated Press and BuzzFeed News.

### TOTAL PARTICIPANTS:

# 36

### POLITICAL LEANING OF PARTICIPANTS

Conservative	16
Moderate	7
Liberal	12
Unknown	1



Project participant Noreen Stutheit expresses her views during the first session of the Casper Project.

Photo by Elysia Conner/Casper Star-Tribune

## Tension during sessions

There were uncomfortable moments at some sessions, including a tense back-and-forth between conservatives and liberals during the discussion on bias and a profane outburst from an attendee at the national journalists forum, which was open to the public. Participants on both ends of the political spectrum privately said they were intensely frustrated when listening to others in the group with an ideology different than their own express their views.

One conservative member quit the project after being convinced his complaints to one presenter about news media bias were falling on deaf ears. A fierce debate over objectivity and credibility prompted a heated exchange between a group participant and a different presenter.



Photo: US State Department

President Trump came up a lot. Conservatives in the group argued he's not given credit for good things he has done for the country. They said the press hates the president and uses its platforms to try to sway public opinion

against him in hopes of getting him out of office, either through the removal process or the next election. They complained about boilerplate negative content journalists add to stories without an effort to get comment from the administration. They were particularly irked by language used to describe the president that evokes negative images.

### SOME OF THE COMMENTS MADE BY PARTICIPANTS:

President Trump is outright called a liar in news stories.

The AP Fact Check is a platform to rail against Trump.

Washington Post owner Jeff Bezos hates Trump and uses the newspaper to attack him.

ABC News journalists told illegal immigrants ordered to leave the country not to open their doors when U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials arrive.

# Session 1

## Trustworthiness of news media

The first session of the project gave attendees an opportunity to share their frustrations with the press, specifically issues surrounding trust, and to get suggestions for improving news reporting. The discussion was facilitated by project manager Rod Hicks.

Most of the topics that emerged were not surprising — biased reporting, anonymous sources, negative stories about President Trump. But there were surprises.

Group participants were eager to be heard, with the discussion taking up every minute of the allotted two hours. They said they appreciated the opportunity to tell someone how they felt about the press.

**The press is too arrogant, said Russell Christiansen, and journalists want to add their narratives to stories instead of just stating the facts. “Don’t be subjective. Don’t try to tell me what to think or how to think or how to interpret,” he said. “Be objective with the reporting.”**

No one in the group liked the use of anonymous sources, although some were willing to accept them, depending on the “payoff” of the information the source provided and whether there was a good reason to protect the person’s identity. Watergate was given as an example of a worthwhile exception.

Gary Trapkus said he’s suspicious of information from unnamed sources. “Mark Twain could’ve written it — fiction!” he said.

Early in the session, participant RC Johnson said one of the biggest problems with news coverage is that it’s filtered through the values, experiences and culture of the predominantly white employees at news organizations.

**“It has a white perspective. It has a white orientation. It values whiteness more than anything else,” said Johnson, the only African-American in the group. “People of color don’t matter.”**



Bob Mullen (above) and RC Johnson (left) make points during the first session of the Casper Project.

Photos by Elysia Conner Casper Star-Tribune

The list of people overlooked by the press began to expand, with participants adding indigenous women, gay people and transgender black women. The culprit was narrowed from whites to white Christian men. Participant Noreen Stutheit stepped in to rein in the conversation.

**“OK, we hate white Christian men,” Stutheit said. “Well, you know, I have three sons. I’m raising white Christian boys and so they’re going around thinking, ‘OK, I suck as a human being? I’m not a human? I’m not an American boy because I’m a white Christian boy?’ So, it’s really like ... we just hate them now.”**

## PARTICIPATION STATS

Total participants

27

Political leaning of participants

Conservative	8
Moderate	7
Liberal	11
Unknown	1



Dean Miller leads a discussion on distinguishing news from other types of information for Casper Project participants.

Photo by Rod Hicks

## Session 2

### Identifying news

Today's media environment is cluttered with content, much of it reaching people through apps on mobile devices. It can be difficult to separate news from other content, particularly since so much of it is disguised as news. This session was intended to help participants develop a system to distinguish news from other types of information, such as propaganda, opinion and advertising. It focused on what makes journalism different — verification, independence, accountability — and how to hold journalists to the highest standards of truth-seeking.

It was led by Dean Miller, then a journalism instructor at Western Washington University in a Bellingham and now editor of *The Port Townsend & Jefferson County Leader* in Port Townsend, Washington. Miller also is the former director of the Center for News Literacy at Stony Brook University. The blur-

ring lines between journalism and other content is intentional, and Miller offered reasons why it's done. He said entertainment borrows from journalism because jokes are funnier, and drama is more compelling when it's grounded in reality. Advertising, publicity and propaganda borrow from journalism to give their messages greater credibility. Journalism also borrows, Miller said. It borrows entertainment, literary and advertising techniques to compete for viewers and readers in the fight for ratings, revenue and relevance, he said.

The session was well received by participants, with most who submitted an evaluation giving it relatively high marks. Some wanted more discussion time, and a few said the heated passions that arose wasted time that could have been used more productively. There was a brief shouting match during the session between liberals and conservatives. Liberals complained that a conservative member dominated the conversation by talking over others who tried to make points. Even Miller

had a tense exchange with a participant who challenged him during a discussion about the credibility of two national media figures. One participant noted feeling "very uncomfortable" during the back-and-forth.

"We need to find a way to get beyond the emotional in our discussions," another participant wrote. "Actually, we need to have more time to finish venting, then find common points for what an ethical, dispassionate, factual news piece would look like."

### PARTICIPATION STATS

Total participants

**28**

Political leaning of participants

Conservative	12
Moderate	6
Liberal	10
Unknown	0

# Session 3

## Identifying news media bias

When participants were asked what they considered the most common problem with news coverage, 59 percent said bias. Session 3 was a forum to discuss news media bias, both what it is and what it isn't. The presenter for the evening was Howard Schneider, executive director of the Center for News Literacy at Stony Brook University. Schneider previously had served as dean of the university's School of Journalism and editor of *Newsday*.

Schneider began by trying to get participants to agree on an accepted definition of news media bias. After several minutes of discussion there was mostly agreement on what bias is not: errors by journalists, news judgment — what goes on the front page or gets air time or digital space, and clearly labeled commentary or opinion. There was confusion about the latter. Of the half-dozen participants who sent examples of news bias, most were examples of commentary, and labeled as such.

Participant Clark Jensen foreshadowed Schneider's definition of news bias: "If the perspective on a topic is consistently on one side or the other, and you never address the other side over a period of time or a period of articles, then that's bias," he said. That's almost the exact definition Schneider uses in his news literacy course at Stony Brook.

**"Given the proliferation of news outlets — and journalistic poseurs — it is always possible to find an example of an unfair or poorly executed story," Schneider wrote later. "But a successful claim of bias requires a pattern of unfairness in news coverage."**

Schneider told participants people bring their own biases to the news they consume. That intrigued one group member who wrote, "Made me think about what bias is and realize we all have it. We need to acknowledge it, analyze it, and understand it so we can open our minds to other ideas and perspectives without feeling threatened or getting emotional."



Howard Schneider talks about news media bias with members of the Casper Project group.

Photo by Rod Hicks

Although Jensen correctly stated Schneider's definition of news bias, he wasn't fully onboard with the presentation. He had challenged some of Schneider's statements earlier in the session.

**"If you look at how CNN covered the Trump/collusion deal for two years, and you compare that to how Fox covered the same events, there's a big difference," he said during the session. "And you're telling me that's not bias? I'm sorry, I don't agree with that."**

Schneider said he couldn't say whether it was bias without more information, such as whether the reports referenced were from news reports, not commentary.

Jensen did not attend any future sessions.

## PARTICIPATION STATS

Total participants

19

Political leaning of participants

Conservative	5
Moderate	4
Liberal	10
Unknown	0



Joshua Wolfson, editor of the *Casper Star-Tribune*, speaks during a panel discussion featuring local journalists.

Photo by Rod Hicks

# Session 4

## Local journalists

Throughout the project, several participants said they want news stories they get to only contain facts — no analysis, no context and certainly no opinion.

At the panel featuring local journalists, *Casper Star-Tribune* Editor Joshua Wolfson pushed back on that notion, suggesting stories that lack context are less useful. Readers need to not only know the facts, they need background and context to fully understand the impact of the facts.

“Quoting someone accurately is important, and including their information is important. But I also think contextualizing that information is an essential part of journalism,” Wolfson said. “Without it, you’re talking about stenography. And stenography and journalism are not the same thing.”

The topic surfaced during a discussion about press releases from politicians’ offices and whether it is acceptable to publish them without seeking additional information from other sources.

One participant wanted to know how much influence advertisers have over news stories that might negatively impact their business. Trevor Trujillo, editor of the local news website Oil City News, took the question, noting that the owner of the site also owns a local advertising agency. Trujillo said the owner, Shawn Houck, allows him to make all editorial decisions.

“Our publisher is very hands off. He’s conscious that he’s in advertising and that’s a thing that will draw criticism,” Trujillo said. “So we’re very careful to not let that seep in. And so far, it hasn’t been a problem.”

### PARTICIPATION STATS

<p><b>Total participants</b></p> <h1 style="font-size: 48px; margin: 0;">20</h1>	<p><b>Political leaning of participants</b></p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Conservative</td> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 2px 10px;">6</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Moderate</td> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 2px 10px;">4</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Liberal</td> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 2px 10px;">10</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 10px;">Unknown</td> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 2px 10px;">0</td> </tr> </table>	Conservative	6	Moderate	4	Liberal	10	Unknown	0
Conservative	6								
Moderate	4								
Liberal	10								
Unknown	0								



## Session 5

### National journalists

The last session of the project, a forum with national journalists, was open to the public and moved to Krampert Theatre to accommodate a larger audience. About 200 people attended the event, which was [livestreamed](#) and featured popular former Gov. Mike Sullivan as moderator.

#### The panelists were:

- **Neal Lipschutz**, deputy editor-in-chief, *The Wall Street Journal*
- **Noreen Gillespie**, deputy managing editor for U.S. News, The Associated Press
- **Lori Montgomery**, deputy national editor, *The Washington Post*
- **Hayes Brown**, world news editor and senior reporter, BuzzFeed News

The fact that news organizations of this prominence were willing to send high-ranking newsroom managers from New York City and Washington, D.C., to Casper, Wyoming, at their own expense is indicative of the importance of forums like this.



Casper resident Dan Allen (above) addresses a panel of national journalists during the last session of the Casper Project, which was open to the public. About 200 people attended the forum.

Photos by Cayla Nimmo/Casper Star-Tribune



Wall Street Journal Editor in Chief Matt Murray said he would have attended instead of Lipschutz had the forum not conflicted with a previous engagement. He said newspaper representatives will be going into the community more. Lipschutz said prior to the session that he looked forward to engaging with readers and that earning their trust “is crucial to the value of journalism.”

The forum opened with an audience member asking panelists to raise their hands if they believed there was a liberal bias in the news media against President Trump and conservative values. No hands went up.

Midway through the program, an audience member, displeased with Brown’s willingness to characterize a tweet from President Trump as racist, insulted guests, hurled obscenities across the auditorium and stormed out.

Before the night was over, the representatives from *The Post* and AP said their news organizations had made the decision to call the tweet racist and outlined the research and deliberation that occurred beforehand.

*“It’s not something that we do in the heat of the moment, it’s not something that we do quickly, and it’s not something we do without deliberation,”* Gillespie said.

Montgomery tried explaining why it’s hard to find stories about something good the president had done. She said administration officials avoid explaining to the press what they’re doing, and policy experts, political observers and others don’t know what to make of actions by Trump and White House officials.

*“The experts look at what he’s actually doing, and it looks like chaos — it doesn’t make sense,”* Montgomery said. *“So I think a lot of what you’re seeing is a reaction to an administration that doesn’t function like other administrations.”*

Toward the end of the forum, a millennial who participated in the project told the panel the race to be first to break a story hurts news outlets if it turns out they got facts wrong.

*“The media is so intent on being the first person to have the story out and being so focused on beating everybody else to the break that accuracy and verification get pushed to the wayside.”*

Arianne Braughton



Noreen Gillespie (above), a deputy managing editor for The Associated Press, and Hayes Brown (left), world news editor at BuzzFeed News, were among the national journalists who participated in the last session of the Casper Project.

Photos by Cayla Nimmo  
Casper Star-Tribune

“The media is so intent on being the first person to have the story out and being so focused on beating everybody else to the break that accuracy and verification get pushed to the wayside,” Arianne Braughton told them.

The forum lasted nearly three hours, almost a half-hour longer than planned. Wyoming PBS will air a 60-minute version of the forum in the fall.

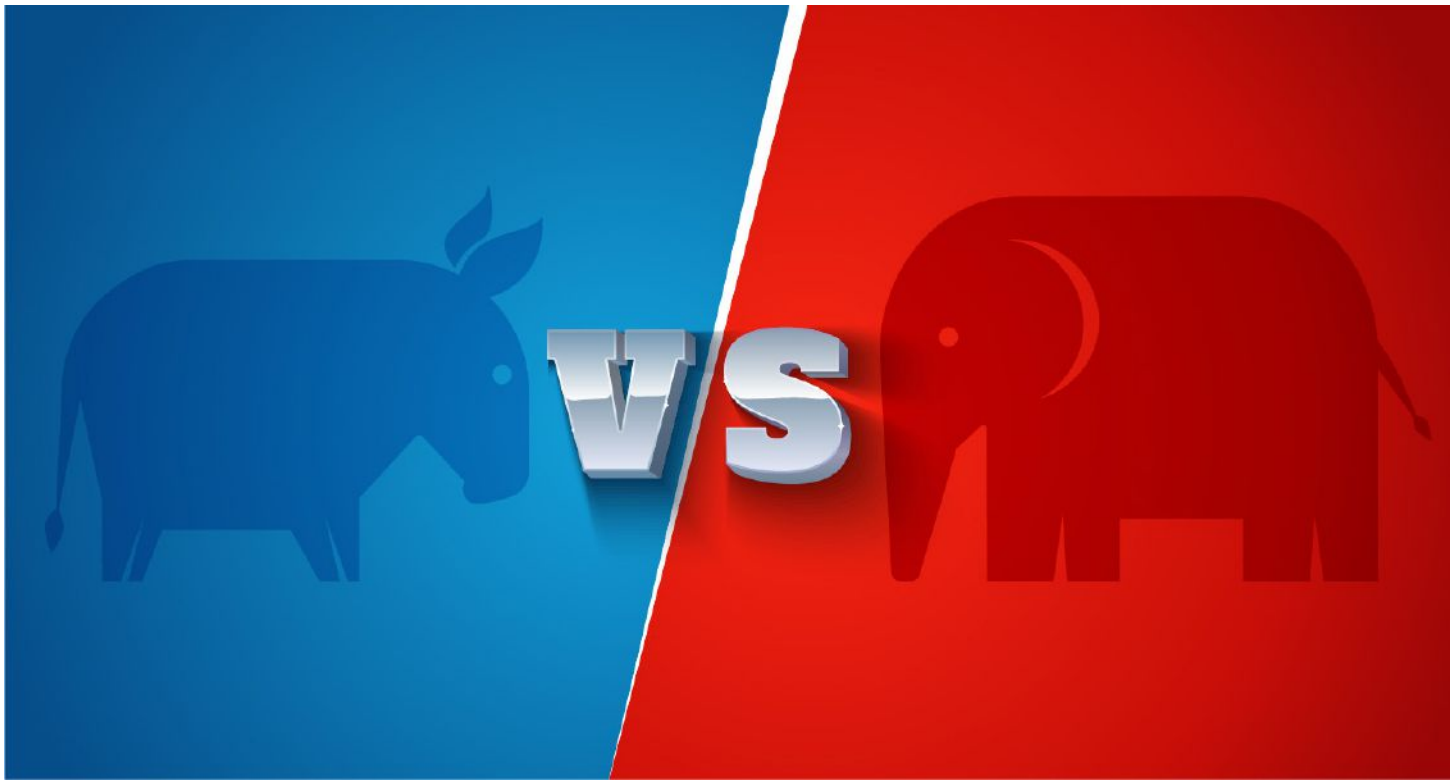
## PARTICIPATION STATS

Total participants

21

Political leaning of participants

Conservative	7
Moderate	4
Liberal	10
Unknown	0



Adobe Stock

# Comparing Liberals and Conservatives

When trust in the news media began falling in the mid-1970s, Republicans and Democrats were roughly equally distrustful, but that began to change two decades later, with Republicans becoming even more distrustful. That trend continues today and was evident during the Casper Project between conservatives and liberals.

Project participants showed no significant changes in the news they chose to consume or their level of trust in the news media after participating in the project, according to their responses on a questionnaire given at the end of the six-month project. Twen-

ty-two of the 36 people who attended at least one session responded to the post-project questionnaire, which contained many of the questions asked at the beginning of the project for comparison. About half of conservatives in the group listed national conservative news organizations as their preferred source of news and half listed local news outlets. Liberals were more likely to list mainstream national news organizations as their preferred source.

One conservative participant said the project “left me believing the press tries to be fair and accurate.” The question to which she was

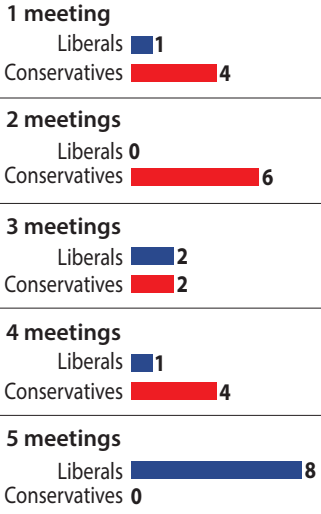
responding was not on the earlier questionnaire. The other six conservatives who responded to the post-project questions said the experience “reinforced my belief that the press is biased.”

**Who bothered to even fill out the post-project survey was equally telling:** seven of 16 conservatives (44% response rate) and 10 of 12 liberals (83% response rate). Four of seven moderates responded (57% response rate).

Although conservatives outnumbered liberals in the group, they came to fewer sessions and had a majority in attendance just once.

## Sessions attended

Number of the five sessions attended, by political leaning



Source: Casper Project attendance reports

# A few takeaways

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of this project was hearing news consumers express their honest, unfiltered thoughts about the work of journalists. They outlined numerous areas where they believe improvement is needed. A few things became clear from their comments.

## **The public doesn't know your language or processes**

Working in journalism for years may leave you with the impression that everyone has the most basic understanding of how things work in the industry. They do not. Some in the Casper Project didn't know that journalists who cite anonymous sources know the identity of those sources. There were group members who didn't know the local newspaper runs just a fraction of the 2,000 stories The Associated Press sends out daily or that stories from news services may be drastically cut or the headlines rewritten to fit available space.

## **There's much confusion over commentary vs. news**

When project members were asked to send stories they believed were biased, even people who claimed to know the difference between news and commentary submitted stories labeled "Opinion," "Commentary," or "Editorial." During session discussions about news, people would often reference cable news commentators.

## **Coverage of Trump viewed as always negative**

How the press covers President Trump came up in each of the five sessions. Those who criticized the coverage found an anti-Trump bias in seemingly all stories produced by the mainstream news media. *The Wall Street Journal* may have been the only exception, though it was only cited a couple of times during the project. None of the critics seemed to entertain the notion that, although perceived as negative, the reporting still could be true and fair.

## **Politics is the big divide**

Bias in news coverage was the de facto theme of the project, and the most common place participants said they found it was in political coverage, more specifically, national political coverage. During the session that featured local journalists, the conversation still turned to national politics. Someone brought a copy of the *Star-Tribune* to the session — to point out problems in an Associated Press story about Trump.

## **Local news sidelined**

The Casper Project aimed to focus on both local and national news, however, local news pretty much rode the bench for most of the project. That's not surprising for a couple of reasons. First, studies consistently show people trust local news sources more than national ones. Also, [interest in national news is up](#), although driven by Democrats. That's not to say local news outlets got a free pass. Local news organizations were criticized in the sessions and on the questionnaires given to participants. They were just overshadowed in this project by the national players.

## **No consensus on unnamed sources**

It was clear from session discussions that participants don't care for anonymous sources, but some are willing to accept them in rare cases. No one suggested they be used more frequently. One participant said he's far less trusting of stories with unnamed sources. Another saw Watergate as the standard for when to allow them, because the information "paid off" on the back end.

## **People want to see themselves reflected in coverage**

There was discussion in the first session about the absence of certain communities from daily news coverage and the abundance of "white Christian men." Carl Oleson said he must seek out other news sources for factual information that better reflects his community. He and his husband have a transgender daughter.

# Recommendations

Most of these recommendations are not new, but they're solid. They encourage news operations to listen to critics with an open mind and accept that there are problems within journalism and every newsroom. Try to understand people's complaints and genuinely search for solutions.

A project member said the problem with journalists is that they're arrogant. Be assured, this is not just the opinion of one guy in Casper, Wyoming.

## Engage

Maintain dialog with your audience. Find out what stories they're interested in and what they believe the news organization can do to better serve the community. Hold meetings at churches, recreation centers, libraries and other community spaces. Find out what people consider persistent problems with your operation. Listen more than you speak. Do not be defensive.

## Educate

Help people understand how your news organization works and how your journalists do their jobs, such as how they know their reporting is accurate. Show off examples of coverage that has had a positive impact on the community. Realize you may be talking past people when you use industry jargon or reference the inner workings of the business. Don't assume non-journalists know your language.

## Seek out bias

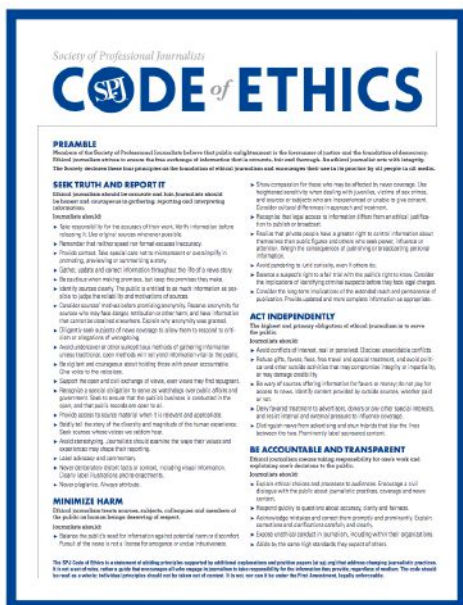
One of the main reasons people abandon a news organization is that they perceive bias in the coverage. Journalists need to take this complaint seriously and trying to identify any bias before a story goes live. Consider ways to make opinion more distinct from news. Reporters who go on local or cable TV news shows should understand the predicament they put their news organization in when they misstate a fact or agree with someone else's views.

## Be transparent

In newsrooms across the country, journalists are taking creative steps to explain to their audience the motivation behind some of their decisions. *The Tennessean*, for example, created a video to explain why its editorial board asked a mayor to resign. This is just one example of actions taken by news organizations posted on the [Trusting News website](#). Replicate some or come up with your own for your newsroom. But demonstrate your interest in keeping your audience informed about what's being done to gain their trust.

## Create your own Casper Project

Combine the first two suggestions to create your own Casper Project. Tailor it to your audience, adding or removing sessions as appropriate. Set a schedule that fits your time and budget. Act on the suggestions that surface whenever possible.



## Follow the code

SPJ's [Code of Ethics](#) addresses many of the issues raised during the sessions. Here's a sampling.

### Journalists should:

- Take responsibility for the accuracy of their work. Verify information before releasing it. Use original sources whenever possible.
- Identify sources clearly. The public is entitled to as much information as possible to judge the reliability and motivations of sources.
- Consider sources' motives before promising anonymity. Reserve anonymity for sources who may face danger, retribution or other harm, and have information that cannot be obtained elsewhere. Explain why anonymity was granted.

- Never deliberately distort facts or context, including visual information.
- Clearly label illustrations and re-enactments.
- Diligently seek subjects of news coverage to allow them to respond to criticism or allegations of wrongdoing.
- Respond quickly to questions about accuracy, clarity and fairness.
- Expose unethical conduct in journalism, including within their organizations.
- Acknowledge mistakes and correct them promptly and prominently. Explain corrections and clarifications carefully and clearly.



Screen capture of a video NBC Justice Correspondent Pete Williams sent to be played during the last session of the Casper Project after he canceled his participation due to a work assignment.

NBC News

## Wanted: A broadcast journalist

Panelists on the national panel represented newspapers, a news service and a digital publication. Noticeably absent was a broadcaster. Pete Williams, a Washington-based justice correspondent for NBC News and Casper native, was set to fill that role until former Special Counsel Robert Mueller was scheduled to testify before two House committees on July 17, the day after the Casper Project forum.

Williams' bosses preferred he cover the testimony, so he canceled his trip to Casper, where he would have moderated the forum. Ultimately, Mueller's testimony was delayed by a week, but the change came too late for Williams to undo his cancellation.

Project manager Rod Hicks selected Democratic former Wyoming Gov. Mike Sullivan as Williams' replacement as moderator, a choice that concerned some SPJ board members.

*"Why is a Democratic ex-governor, who also served in the Clinton administration, hosting an SPJ event about media trust?" board member Michael Koretzky asked. "Isn't this the opposite of establishing trust?"*

Hicks said Sullivan remained popular and respected by residents throughout the state, regardless of their political views. His presence "raises the stature of this forum in the eyes of Wyoming residents, even if that's not the case elsewhere in the country," Hicks said. "There is value in having someone independent of journalism participate in a discussion about why journalists are not trusted."

Williams acknowledged his replacement in a taped video message played during the forum.

*"I see you've traded up by enlisting Mike Sullivan as the moderator," he said. "I have no doubt he'll do a better job."*

Invitations to participate in the forum also had been sent to Fox News Channel, CNN and National Public Radio.

*"There is value in having someone independent of journalism participate in a discussion about why journalists are not trusted."*

Rod Hicks

# Mueller and memes

Shortly after the Mueller Report was released, project participants were emailed a link to the 448-page document and asked if they wanted to share thoughts with the group about how the press covered it.

This started a debate that increased in intensity and ended when a member posted a crass meme maligning prominent Democrats. Equal time was given to the investigation of President Trump (and the politics surrounding it) and how the press covered it.

“The Mueller Report is another example of how fake news destroys people these days and is reason that media is becoming less and less trusted,” wrote Bob Brechtel, a former member of the Wyoming House of Representatives.

“The Mueller report is what it is BUT no retractions of accusations of collusion, which has been the media narrative for past 2 years, from any mainstream media,” Joe Primrose wrote.

“With as much media coverage as there was during the entire investigation, and as slanted as the coverage was against the Trump administration and the president, it would be hard for anyone to have objective and unbiased input into the investigation,” wrote Russ Christiansen.

Concerned that so many comments suggested unfair coverage, Pamela Kandt injected an opposing view while also calling on fellow group members to open their minds to factual reporting.

“In general, overall news media coverage of Trump Campaign & Trump Administration activities since the summer of 2016 has been comprehensive and surprisingly accurate,” she wrote.

Chuck Hawley drew comments for saying it was unnecessary to read the entire report to get an understanding of its findings and that “you have to dig deep” to find stories on negative comments former Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein made about the media.

Dale Anderson cited five stories he said he quickly found about Rosenstein’s comments from news organizations that included *U.S. News & World Report*, *The New York Times* and *The Associated Press*, via National Public Radio.

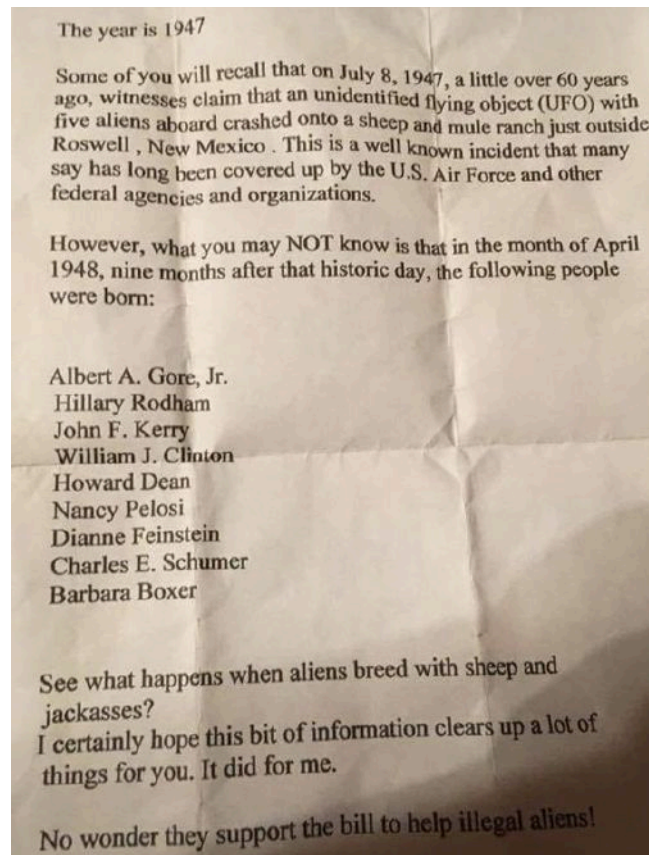
As the debate continued into a second week and people began directing comments to specific group members, some members requested they be removed from the discussion. “Too busy for this right now,” Dee Lundberg, declared.

The comments on May 3 began early and continued into the evening. The last one for the day — and last in the discussion — came from Hawley in the form of a meme that implied several Democrats were the offspring of aliens and farm animals.

Bill and Hillary Clinton, Al Gore, Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer all were mocked in the meme.

Rod Hicks chided Hawley, and he apologized.

That was the end of email discussions during the project.





Presenter Howard Schneider (left) listens as project participant Clark Jensen (right center) makes a point about media bias.

## A conservative bails

Conservative group member Clark Jensen believed presenter Howard Schneider was downplaying the prevalence of bias in news reporting and questioned some of his assertions. Exchanges between the two were civil, with a calm Jensen making his arguments in measured short sentences.

He disagreed with Schneider's argument that story selection generally does not reflect a bias. Jensen, an optometrist and school district trustee, said editors run stories that line up with their interests.

"Do you think these things line up with their interests?" Schneider said, pointing to a newspaper front page projected onto a big screen. "Do you think that they consciously say, 'You know, we are upset about prison population?' Or are these things that they think will be either interesting or important ... to their audience?"

When project assistant Rebecca Travers reached out to Jensen after the session, he said he had quit the project.

### HIS EMAIL:

*I am pretty disillusioned about this project. On the last meeting we were asked to bring examples of bias in the media. I came prepared with clippings from the newspaper, but we were never asked about that. The bottom line from the speaker seemed to be, 'the news media might have some bias but that doesn't matter because the consumer of news needs to be the one who is able to discriminate between good and bad news sources.' While I do feel there is some truth to what he said, he really didn't seem to be concerned about the media bias much. I find that very troubling.*

*I walked away feeling like there was no point in this exercise. It felt more like I was being told what to think rather than to try to address the real issue.*

*I won't be back. It was a waste of time.*

---

Clark Jensen



Fox News Channel host Sean Hannity.

Photo: Frank Franklin II/AP Photo

## Participant vs. presenter

At the second session about identifying news, there were sparks regarding objectivity and credibility, including a heated exchange between presenter Dean Miller and conservative participant Chuck Hawley. Miller had just told the story of alleged plagiarism by former *New York Times* Executive Editor Jill Abramson. Then he focused on Fox News Channel host Sean Hannity for promoting false claims that the murder of a young Democratic National Committee worker was linked to a leak of DNC emails.

“Hannity, though, is not a journalist. He has opinions,” Hawley interjected.

“The problem is that these guys wrap themselves in the flag of journalism,” Miller said.

“But he’s not a journalist, and he says it every day,” Hawley said. “They say, ‘We have our opinion area.’ And those people are opinion. They’re not journalists.”

“An opinion ought to be based on facts, and he didn’t have any,” Miller said.

“How about Adam Schiff, who lied for a year and a half,” Hawley began before being cut off by Miller.

“Don’t ‘how ‘bout’ me on this!” Miller roared. “Just say he did it wrong! Can you?”

Unruffled, Hawley responded: “Right or wrong, he’s an opinion guy.”

“You can’t do it. You can’t do it! Criticize him and move on!” Miller said.

“You’re criticizing an opinion guy, and that’s different!” Hawley said.





Conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh.

Photo: Jeff Roberson/AP Photo

## Defending Limbaugh by contradicting him

An attendee of Dean Miller's presentation criticized him for calling conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh an entertainer during the session.

"This is a complete mischaracterization and reveals a strong bias," the participant wrote in an evaluation of the session. "This completely soured me on the ostensible purpose of this whole exercise."

Limbaugh addressed characterizations of him as an entertainer on his Aug. 18, 2015 show.

*"I don't deny I'm an entertainer; this is showbiz," Limbaugh said, according to a transcript of the show on his [website](#). "But I also don't deny that I am deadly serious about the things I care about. And I definitely want certain things, ideas, to triumph, and others to lose, big time."*

The participant, whose identity is unknown because the evaluations are submitted anonymously, decided to not let Miller's true statement drive him away from the project.

"I'll continue to attend just out of curiosity but there seems to be no sincere attempt to truly learn 'why the public distrusts the media,'" the participant wrote. "Minds seem to be already made up."



# Session presenters



## SESSION 1

**Rod Hicks**, Journalist on Call for the Society of Professional Journalists, led this session. *See his bio on page 28.*



## SESSION 2

**Dean Miller** is editor of *The Port Townsend & Jefferson County Leader* in Port Townsend, Washington. His long journalism career includes working as a reporter and editor in Idaho newsrooms — from Sandpoint to Idaho Falls — for 24 years, and more recently teaching journalism at Western Washington University. He is the former director of the Center for News Literacy at Stony Brook University.



## SESSION 3

**Howard Schneider** is the founding dean of the School of Journalism at Stony Brook University and currently is executive director of its Center for News Literacy. For more than 35 years, Schneider was a reporter and editor at *Newsday*. For nearly 18 of those years, he was managing editor and then editor. Under his tenure, the newspaper won eight Pulitzer Prizes.



## SESSION 4

**Halle Jones** is week-night anchor at KTWO-TV in Casper. She joined the station as a news reporter in 2017. Before moving to Wyoming, she attended the University of Colorado at Boulder, where she covered its football team, the Buffaloes, for three years. She worked in the Sports Information Department, focused primarily on football, volleyball and basketball. Jones has won two Wyoming Association of Broadcasters awards since joining KTWO.



**Nick Learned** is news director at K2 Radio in Casper. He had no previous news experience when he began his radio career at KOWB in Laramie in 2015. He joined K2 Radio about a year later. Learned

said he had the “good fortune” to work for people who mentored him and helped him become a better reporter. The Boise, Idaho, native is a drummer and member of four bands.



**Trevor T. Trujillo** is editor of the Oil City News, a digital publication that covers Casper. He also has experience working at radio and television stations, including serving as news director at a radio

operation in Laramie from 2006 to 2014. Trujillo has stage and screen experience and has appeared on Nickelodeon, TruTV, Adult Swim and in several independent films.



**Joshua Wolfson** is editor of the *Casper Star-Tribune*. He previously was the newspaper’s managing editor, headed its arts section and held reporting positions covering crime and health. Wolfson

grew up in Anchorage, Alaska, and Los Angeles before earning a journalism degree from San Francisco State University. He moved to Casper more than 12 years ago after working for publications in northern California. He joined the *Star-Tribune* in 2007.



## SESSION 5

**Hayes Brown** is world news editor and a senior reporter for BuzzFeed News. He serves alongside the World desk’s team of correspondents covering breaking news around the globe. He also serves as a guest host for BuzzFeed’s programs “AM to DM,” a weekday morning talk show livestreamed on Twitter and “Profile,” a weekly interview show broadcast on Facebook. Previously, he was world editor at ThinkProgress, where he covered international and national security news.



**Noreen Gillespie** is deputy managing editor for U.S. News at The Associated Press. She oversees a team of journalists based in all 50 states covering breaking news, politics and policy, and special topics. She began her career as a legislative reporter in Hartford, Connecticut, and has been an

editor and manager in Atlanta, Chicago, and New York. She also served as deputy sports editor, overseeing college football coverage and leading the news agency's journalists at the Rio Olympics.



**Neal Lipschutz** is deputy editor in chief of *The Wall Street Journal*, where he helps oversee the global news operation. Previously, he was standards and ethics editor for *The Journal*. He joined Dow Jones & Co., the newspaper's parent

company, in 1982 as a national copy reader for Dow Jones Capital Markets Report. He held several management positions and was named managing editor for Dow Jones Newswires in 2005. He was top editor of Newswires until becoming standards editor.

**Lori Montgomery** is deputy national editor at



*The Washington Post*, where she helps lead coverage of Washington, politics and the nation. She oversees coverage of the Trump administration and Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 election, for which the

paper won a Pulitzer Prize. For years, she was a congressional and economic policy reporter. Before joining *The Post*, she was Europe bureau chief for Knight-Ridder Newspapers, based in Berlin.

**Mike Sullivan** was twice elected governor of



Wyoming, serving from 1987 until 1995. The Democratic governor encouraged diversifying the state's economy and supported the energy sector while working to avoid compromising Wyoming's environment. Gov. Sullivan served as U.S.

Ambassador to Ireland in the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations. He retired in 2016 as a partner of the law firm Rothgerber, Johnson & Lyons LLP. Sullivan was moderator for the fifth session.

# Project team

## PROJECT MANAGER

**Rod Hicks** is SPJ's Journalist on Call, a position created to address the issue of dwindling trust in the news media. The Casper Project is consistent with the mission of the position to help journalists understand why the public doesn't trust them and what they can do to re-earn more trust. Hicks previously worked as an editor at the Associated Press and several newspapers, including the *Detroit News*, *Detroit Free Press* and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and managed three conventions for the National Association of Black Journalists. He holds a master's degree in newspaper management from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University and a bachelor's degree in mass communication from the University of Alabama.



## PROJECT ASSISTANT

**Rebecca Travers** was born and raised in Wyoming and currently lives in Casper, where she is an active member of the community and a familiar face to many. Her deep knowledge of the area and its residents made her a valuable resource for the Casper Project. Just as important is her previous

experience as an administrative assistant and her interest in addressing social issues. She assisted with the project while enrolled as a full-time student at Casper College. She graduated during the project and now works as a program assistant for ServeWyoming.

# Project participants

*“My thoughts on improvement, of course, would be to have more people of color, because I kind of tend to be the only person who shows up at the event.*

*But I think we can cultivate that and especially help people understand they have a voice, they need to provide that voice so that there are different thoughts, different ideas out there.”*

RC Johnson



*“Personally, I do not read news articles that should be in the opinion pages, and there seems to be more and more of them.”*

Bob Gervais



*“The information I got between the conspiracy theory rants was valuable and thought-provoking.”*

Dee Lundberg



*“The media is so intent on being the first person to have the story out, and being so focused on beating everybody else to the break that accuracy and verification get pushed to the wayside.”*

Arianne Braughton



*“It’s our responsibility to not just look at one source or one piece of information or one whatever. ... We’ve got to quit being lazy.”*

Cynthia Nunley



*“Journalists will never change their tone or positions because they believe they are right and superior to us. They LIKED the good old days when ABC, CBS and NBC all told the same news and people accepted it.”*

Noreen Stutheit

*“I walked away feeling like there was no point in this exercise. It felt more like I was being told what to think rather than to try to address the real issue.”*

Clark Jensen



*“I think it’s really not what you report, it’s what you don’t report. It’s when the stories are positive towards conservative ideas they get buried or they get ignored.”*

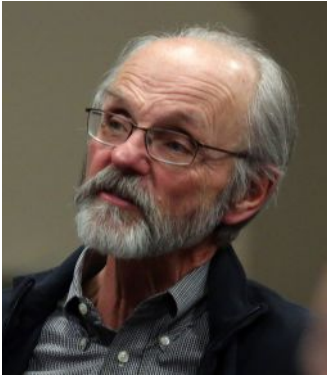
Chuck Hawley



*“Don’t be subjective. Don’t try to tell me what to think or how to think or how to interpret. Be objective with the reporting.”*

Russ Christiansen

# Additional project participants



Bob Mullen



Pamela Kandt



Liz Batton



Robert Johnston



Pam Martin



Dale Anderson



Pamala Rush



Berton Toews



Belle Stapleton



Carl Oleson



Carolyn Toews



Mark Hyman

## PARTICIPANTS NOT PICTURED

Bob Brechtel  
Leann Brechtel  
Paul Centanino  
Suzette Cole  
Lindsey Erickson  
Tim Force  
Jane Ifland  
Tom Mahrer  
Joe Primrose  
Brandi Ramage  
Patrick Sweeney  
Ben Taucher  
Paul Thew  
Gary Trapkus  
Leslie Yeigh

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## Acknowledgements

### Corporate

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Center for News Literacy  
Denise James Media  
Oil City News  
ICJ Design  
KCWY-TV  
K2 Radio  
KTWO-TV  
The Wall Street Journal  
*The Washington Post*

### Individuals

Antone Amye  
Ruby L. Bailey  
Jim Beck  
Larry Burger  
Rabiah Burks  
Cathryn Becker  
Craig Blumenshine  
Dale Bohren  
Susan Burk

Melissa M. Cassutt  
Donnie Claunch  
Elysia Conner  
Heather Corson  
Samin Dadelahi  
Sloan Dickey  
Terry Dugas  
Carter Dunn  
Monique Fields  
Erich Frankland  
Macy Gates  
Andrew Graham  
Brian J. Harnisch  
Brad Heath  
Mark Hyman  
Denise James  
Sean Johnson  
Charles Jones  
Brent Kleinjan  
Brendan LaChance  
Sandy Leotta  
Kevin Loker  
Christopher Lorenzen  
Joy Mayer  
Alison Bethel McKenzie

Mike McLemore  
Velvet S. McNeil  
Tom Morton  
Shonya Neuman  
Cayla Nimmo  
Kyle Nicholoff  
Dan Neal  
Sarah Neubauer  
Lynnsey Patterson  
Gregory Payan  
Lorene Peterson  
Mayor Charles Powell  
Bob Price  
Alan Rogers  
Andrew Schotz  
Lisa Scroggins  
James Simmons  
Shannon Smith  
Belle Stapleton  
Christian Starkey  
State Rep. Patrick Sweeney  
Pete Williams  
Ryan Williams  
Noah White

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Eugene S. Pulliam National Journalism Center  
3909 N. Meridian St., Suite 200  
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317-927-8000

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