

NC House of Representatives Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, January 24th, 2025

Speaker Hall Names Reps. Torbett, Kidwell to Lead New Interim House Select Committee on Government Efficiency

RALEIGH, N.C. – North Carolina House Speaker Destin Hall today announced the formation of the interim House “Select Committee on Government Efficiency,” chaired by Representatives John Torbett and Keith Kidwell, to examine state and local government operations for potential waste, duplication of services, mismanagement, and violations of constitutional liberties.

“Unnecessary government bloat and waste hurt North Carolina taxpayers’ wallets and divert funds that could be used for core functions such as public safety and education,” said Speaker Destin Hall (R-Caldwell). “I am excited to appoint Reps. Torbett and Kidwell to this select committee as the North Carolina House seeks to restore state and local governments across North Carolina to their proper, limited roles.”

The committee is authorized to look at DEI policies, excess state property, and other potential wastes of taxpayer dollars.

“North Carolinians deserve a state government that works for them,” said Rep. John Torbett (R-Gaston). “Unfortunately, our government agencies and public universities have been bogged down by bad policies and programs, like DEI, limiting their ability to enact their core purpose: serving citizens. I am proud to chair this committee alongside Rep. Kidwell to continue improving our state.”

Rep. Keith Kidwell further explained, “As the new Trump administration rightfully takes aim at Washington D.C.’s wasteful spending and inefficient bureaucracy, it is time for us in Raleigh to do the same. This committee will investigate ways our state government can maximize value for North Carolina taxpayers, protect constitutional rights, and end the weaponization of state power.”

The standing State and Local Government committee is also authorized to consider legislation on these topics during the 2025-26 long session. The select committee will hold organizational meetings during the regular session, with the majority of its work conducted during the interim period.

###

Kevin Johnson for Wayne County Press Release

Kevin Johnson

Kevin Johnson for Wayne County

919-222-1527

kejohns69@gmail.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kevin Johnson Announces Candidacy for Wayne County Commissioner

PIKEVILLE, N.C. — Kevin Johnson has officially announced his candidacy for Wayne County Commissioner At-Large, seeking to carry forward the legacy of the late Commissioner Wayne Aycock. A lifelong advocate for rural communities, Johnson brings decades of experience in agriculture, business leadership, and hands-on service to the people of Wayne County.

Johnson currently serves as the Program Manager for the NC Foundation of Soil and Water Conservation, where he works daily to protect family farms and preserve the land that sustains eastern North Carolina. His work ensures that future generations can continue to farm, work, and raise their families on the same soil their parents and grandparents did.

“Families here know the meaning of service—whether it’s on the farm, in the community, or in uniform. My family is no different. I’m running to honor that spirit of service and to ensure Wayne County remains a place where our military families and rural communities can thrive.” — Kevin Johnson

As former Director of the Wayne County Cooperative Extension and past Chair of the Wayne County Chamber of Commerce Board, Johnson has a long record of supporting local farmers, strengthening small businesses, and helping the county’s economy grow in a responsible, community-driven way.

In addition to his professional experience, Johnson has been an active community volunteer, youth soccer coach, and deacon at his church. His dedication to service is also reflected in his family—his son currently serves in the United States Navy.

Johnson is running to offer steady, dependable, common-sense leadership on the Wayne County Board of Commissioners. His priorities include protecting farmland, investing in public safety, and safeguarding taxpayers’ dollars—all while working to recruit good jobs, strengthen infrastructure, and position the county for long-term prosperity. For more information head to kevinforwayne.com.

###

Sample Political Tweets

In response to Rep. Frost's visit to North Carolina:

Rep. Frost defends MS-13 thugs in El Salvador, scolds North Carolinians, and ghosts his own district—meanwhile the border burns and Floridians foot the bill.

He's collecting passport stamps, not solving problems. Someone get this clown a map and a one-way ticket.

In response to The Laken Riley Act:

Thank you [@POTUS](#) [@realDonaldTrump](#)! The Laken Riley Act makes all North Carolinians safer and empowers law enforcement to protect our citizens. The NC House will continue to do its part to ensure violent illegal migrants are off our streets. [#ncpol](#)

In response to NCORR committee meeting:

Today's [#ncga](#) hearing proves once again that, even over half a decade since Matthew and Florence, Cooper's NCORR is not prepared to finish Eastern NC's recovery. Those still waiting to return to their homes cannot afford any more negligence. [#ncpol](#)

In celebration of Speaker Hall's passage of House Bill 318

NC House Republicans just passed [@ncspeakerhall](#)'s Criminal Illegal Alien Enforcement Act. No more sanctuary sheriffs. No more catch-and-release. Just common sense & law and order. [#ncpol](#)

Crisis Communications Social Media Press Release for Britney Spears

Dear Britney Army,

I want to stop and take a moment to express my love and gratitude. Recently my social media has been a topic of discussion in news outlets and tabloids, questioning my sanity and my freedom. However, you, Britney Army, continue to stand up for me, just as you did while I was held back from the pursuit of happiness. There is a reason I am able to write this today.

For me, self-expression is an important part of my healing process and for some it may seem unorthodox or frightening. One of the ways I express myself is through dance, one of the most passionate forms of art and expression – my pain, my creativity, my joy and my journey of healing. As an artist I look for new and innovating ways to create, as a human, I look for expressive ways to heal. I am constantly working towards a journey of freedom and reclaiming my voice.

Beyond dance, I am excited to share that I have been channeling my journey through my upcoming memoir *The Woman in Me*. This book has my story in my own words, reflecting on the years of growth and pain I have experienced. I hope that those who criticize my art can try to understand my actions better through this book.

For my fans who may still be worried, I want to make it clear – around me is an army of friends, family, and mental health professionals who are with me to help me make the best decisions for my well being and career. However, at the end of the day I am the ringleader of the circus I call life. While this life and freedom may express itself in ways that concern you, please know that I am doing better than I ever was.

Your love and support has guided me out of some of my lowest points. I am grateful for my fans who have stood by me and allowed me to live my truth. As I continue to explore who I am creatively and as a woman, I hope you'll stay with me. There is so much in store for us.

I leave you with this, I am still that same carefree, loving girl that just wants to dance and share her heart with the world. Thank you for being part of my journey.

With love and gratitude,

Britney

Axios Essay

The Axios Revolution: How Smart Brevity Could Save Local Journalism

I. Introduction

Journalism in itself may be described as a dying profession by some, with many local news organizations shutting their doors. Local Journalism has been on the decline across the nation with a majority of Americans in 2024 preferring digital media over local news (Shearer et al., 2024) but Axios, a company founded by former Politico journalists, has been redefining local journalism through the smart brevity model. The world of social media and short form content (X, Instagram, Tiktok, and Facebook) has taken up the market share that local newspapers and television stations used to have a monopoly on. Axios, however, has taken on the challenge of local media and finding ways to make it more accessible and digestible for common audiences. Axios launched in 2017 with the mission to “deliver the clearest, smartest, most efficient and trustworthy experience for audience and advertisers alike. They cover stories clinically, not ideologically (Axios | ROPER CENTER, n.d.). The way that Axios achieves this mission is through a form of writing that matches the Smart Brevity format, keeping stories concise for the everyday reader. The Smart Brevity format is about 50 percent shorter than regular news stories, conforming to the short form content many are consuming today, while still keeping main details and information. Interestingly enough, Axios is also employing a local approach to deliver news through its city-based newsletters. Axios is bringing local content to places where local news organizations face financial troubles and risk being shut down. Axios' Smart Brevity model represents a viable solution for struggling local news organizations by better serving modern readers' needs and creating a sustainable business model.

II. The Current State of Local News

From the beginning of the history of the United States, local news and newspapers helped provide the information needed for democracy and connection to thrive. For the Washington Post, their own publication's motto is that “democracy dies in darkness” reflecting on the importance of local news.

The importance and appreciation for local newspapers is seen in the 19th century, “As pioneers moved West in the 19th century, one of the first orders of business – right after hiring a lawman to keep order – was establishing a local newspaper” (Abernathy, 2020). However, as the landscape of media continues to change, cities across the United States are seeing a dwindling of local news organizations, turning them into what many call “news deserts,” depriving thousands of people of fact-based information about their towns. The rise of social media and short form content has impacted the way people consume news and for many local news organizations, their reach on social media is not large nor profitable enough to keep their doors open. Their decline is identified by the UNC Center for Media Law and Policy as “...far worse than most people realize.” The report by the Center continues to state that, “In the U.S., 200 counties do not have a local newspaper, nearly 50% of counties only have one newspaper, usually a weekly, and more than 6% of counties have no dedicated news coverage at all” (Ardia et al., n.d.). Developing strategies that appeal to newsreaders and non-newsreaders is important to find ways to elevate news organizations once again.

Economic challenges have significantly undermined the sustainability of local news organizations through multiple converging factors. While traditional newspapers once maintained stable revenue through print subscriptions and local advertising, this model has been severely disrupted in the digital age. Between 2008 and 2013, U.S. newspaper advertising revenue plummeted by 42%, followed by another 44% decline over the next five years - resulting in a devastating 68% decrease in just a decade (Hendrickson, 2019). The shift to digital platforms has created a particularly challenging environment for local news outlets. While many have developed online presences, they struggle to convert online readers into digital subscribers. This leaves them in an unsustainable position of maintaining expensive print operations for a shrinking subscriber base while failing to generate sufficient digital revenue. The dominance of tech giants has exacerbated this problem - Facebook and Google now capture 77% of digital advertising revenue in local markets, leaving news publishers with an increasingly small share (Hendrickson, 2019).

Corporate ownership structures have often worsened these challenges. Hedge funds and large media conglomerates have acquired many local papers, often implementing aggressive cost-cutting measures that further diminish their ability to serve communities effectively. For example, Alden Global Capital has eliminated over 1,000 newsroom jobs across its newspaper holdings in just ten years. The cumulative impact has been severe - newsroom employment fell 47% between 2008-2018, with many papers forced to reduce coverage, merge operations, or close entirely (Hendrickson, 2019). Over 2,000 local newspapers have disappeared since 2004, creating "news deserts" in over 200 U.S. counties. Unlike national papers which have found ways to thrive in the digital environment, local news organizations face an existential crisis in developing sustainable business models for the future. The COVID-19 Pandemic affected local news organizations severely, creating financial strain and pushing journalists to their limits and unable to focus on topics that are relevant directly to their community (Ardia et al., n.d.). While many newspapers and local media organizations are failing and failing to adapt to the economic and consumer challenges in a new era of media, Axios is finding its footing through the Smart Brevity model.

III. Axios and Smart Brevity

The digital transformation of news consumption has created significant challenges for local news organizations struggling to adapt to modern consumer habits. While the worldwide web once served as the primary gateway to news content, audiences are increasingly gravitating toward social media platforms as their preferred method of news consumption (Shearer et al., 2024). This shift has forced news organizations to reevaluate their traditional distribution and revenue models. Axios and its local news divisions have emerged as notable exceptions to the industry's struggles, successfully maintaining steady revenue streams while preserving open access to important local news coverage. Their approach notably differs from many traditional outlets by eschewing paywalls that often deter readers from accessing critical local information. "Each Axios Local city has a landing page with no paywall and a newsletter, emailed free to subscribers every weekday" (Reardon, 2022).

This accessibility-first approach has proven particularly effective in building and maintaining a loyal readership base. While many local news organizations contend that paywalls are essential for financial survival and maintaining staff payroll, Axios has demonstrated the viability of alternative revenue models. Through a combination of strategic advertising partnerships and their distinctive "smart brevity" format, they've developed a sustainable business model that serves both readers and advertisers effectively. "Ted Williams, general manager of Axios Local, said that the model is mainly advertising-based. He gauges the advertising mix at 60% local buyers and 40% national" (Reardon, 2022). This balanced approach to advertising revenue has allowed Axios to maintain editorial independence while ensuring financial sustainability. While the model of Axios proves to be effective, some argue that smart brevity is a format that hinders the core values of local journalism rather than uplift them.

While Axios's smart brevity model appears innovative in addressing modern attention spans and digital consumption habits, it risks fundamentally undermining the core functions of local journalism. The 50% reduction in content length necessarily sacrifices the depth, context, and nuance required to properly cover complex local issues like municipal budgets, zoning changes, school board policies, and environmental impacts. More critically, this condensed format could severely hamper investigative journalism - a cornerstone of local news that requires extensive detail, multiple perspectives, and comprehensive evidence to effectively expose corruption, track long-term trends, and analyze complex community issues. The truncated format might satisfy quick news consumption but fails to support the type of in-depth reporting that historically has driven meaningful community change. While Axios has found success with its advertising-based revenue model in larger markets, this approach may not be sustainable for smaller communities with limited advertising bases and digital infrastructure.

However, The criticism of smart brevity overlooks how modern information consumption has fundamentally changed and how adaptation is crucial for survival, not optional. While critics argue that the condensed format sacrifices depth and investigative capacity, they fail to recognize that unread long-form journalism serves no purpose at all - and that's exactly what's happening as traditional local news outlets continue to shutter across America, creating expanding news deserts. Smart brevity actually serves as a gateway to deeper engagement, with Axios's model allowing for hyperlinked references, follow-up coverage, and specialized newsletters that let readers dive deeper into topics that interest them while maintaining accessibility for broader audiences. The argument that smart brevity cannot support investigative journalism or community dialogue ignores how digital formats can layer information effectively - a concise summary can lead readers to more detailed coverage, supporting documents, and community discussion forums, potentially reaching and engaging far more citizens than traditional long-form articles that many modern readers skip entirely. Furthermore, Axios's success in maintaining profitable local coverage without paywalls demonstrates that smart brevity isn't just about shortening content - it's about reimagining how local journalism can survive and thrive in a digital age where competition for attention is fierce and traditional revenue models have collapsed.

IV. Conclusion

The Smart Brevity format directly addresses several key challenges facing modern news consumption: time constraints, information overload, and changing reading habits. By delivering concise, focused content without sacrificing essential information, Axios has found a way to serve both busy professionals and casual news readers while maintaining journalistic integrity. Their decision to avoid paywalls while building a robust advertising-based revenue model (with a 60-40 split between local and national advertisers) shows that quality local journalism can remain accessible to all readers while generating sustainable revenue.

Perhaps most significantly, Axios's model offers a potential solution to the growing crisis of "news deserts" across the United States. In an era where 200 counties lack a local newspaper and nearly half have only one weekly publication, Axios's ability to establish and maintain profitable local news operations suggests a replicable framework for revitalizing local journalism. Their success demonstrates that by adapting to modern reading habits and building sustainable business models, local news organizations can continue to fulfill their essential role in supporting informed democracy and community engagement.

As the media landscape continues to evolve, the Axios model may not be the only solution to the challenges facing local journalism, but it offers valuable lessons for news organizations seeking to adapt and thrive in the digital age. Their experience shows that by embracing innovation in both content delivery and business strategy, local journalism can find new ways to serve communities effectively while maintaining financial sustainability.

References

- Abernathy, P. M. (2020, June 8). WILL LOCAL NEWS SURVIVE? The Expanding News Desert. Retrieved November 12, 2024, from https://www.usnewsdeserts.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020_News_Deserts_and_Ghost_Newspapers.pdf
- Ardia, D., Ringel, E., Ekstrand, V. S., & Fox, A. (n.d.). Addressing the decline of local news, rise of platforms, and spread of mis- and disinformation online - The Center for Information, Technology, and Public Life (CITAP) | The Center for Information, Technology, and Public Life (CITAP). unc citap. Retrieved November 12, 2024, from <https://citap.unc.edu/news/local-news-platforms-mis-disinformation/>
- Axios | ROPER CENTER. (n.d.). Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. Retrieved November 12, 2024, from <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/axios>
- Hendrickson, C. (2019, November 12). LOCAL JOURNALISM IN CRISIS. Brookings Institution. Retrieved November 14, 2024, from <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Local-Journalism-in-Crisis.pdf>
- Reardon, M. (2022, March 21). Axios Local, bringing "Smart Brevity" to a town near you. Editor and Publisher. Retrieved November 17, 2024, from <https://www.editorandpublisher.com/stories/axios-bringing-smart-brevity-to-a-town-near-you,221578>
- Robertson, K. (2022, March 7). Axios Wants Us to Read Everything in Bullet Points (Published 2022). The New York Times. Retrieved November 17, 2024, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/business/media/axios-local.html>
- Shearer, E., Matsa, K. E., Lipka, M., Eddy, K., & Forman, N. (2024, May 7). Americans' Changing Relationship With Local News. Pew Research Center. Retrieved November 11, 2024, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2024/05/07/americans-changing-relationship-with-local-news/>
- Toff, B., Palmer, R., & Nielsen, R. K. (2024, January 16). Five things news media can do to respond to consistent news avoidance. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Retrieved November 17, 2024, from <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/five-things-news-media-can-do-respond-consistent-news-avoidance>
- Williams, T. (2020, December 17). Company News: Why we're joining Axios. Axios. Retrieved November 17, 2024, from <https://www.axios.com/local/charlotte/2020/12/18/company-news-why-were-joining-axios-242986#>