

Jerry W. Schrecker
Fayetteville Observer Subscriber
1002 Asbury Rd
Eastover, North Carolina 28312
October 18, 2017

Kirk A. Davis, CEO
GateHouse Media LLC
198 Sully's Trail, Third Floor
Corporate Crossings Office Park
Pittsford, New York 14534

FORMAL COMPLAINT

Please allow me to establish my bonafides.

First and foremost I'm a money paying subscriber to GateHouse Media via the Fayetteville Observer and have been for many years. Additionally I have been very proactive in defending Fayetteville Observer's right, and ultimately GateHouse Media's right to collect remuneration for their work product to those who moronically complain in comments about not being allowed more than 10 free articles a month expecting to receive the publication for free.

I served with distinction in the United States Army Military Police Corp and was awarded the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for serving in combat for my country. I served with distinction with the Fayetteville Police Department and retired in good standing.

In the interest of full disclosure I am also a private server administrator and host a number of organizations and gaming sites under my server domain fayettevilleforum.net such as Ezra King Productions, Africa Web, TPTN, Washtonian, TestBed Inc. and TPT just to name a few.

However hosting them does not mean that I own any of the websites, just as GateHouse Media's registrar MarkMonitor, Inc. doesn't own or operate GateHouse Media.

I believe that GateHouse Media is unaware that the personal agendas' of some employees at the Fayetteville Observer are in direct opposition to GateHouse Media's overall goals. And not just the goal of profit, which serves to bring pay checks and benefits to thousands of employees and dividends to stockholders connected with GateHouse Media. But also the goal of bringing the best product possible to the various communities that is useful and exhaustively complete, rather than manipulative which angers subscribers and causes subscription losses.

These personal agendas appear to be in direct violation to the policy of GateHouse Media:

"At GateHouse Media, our mission is to deliver high quality and trusted journalism, products and services that enrich the communities we serve — our readers, commercial partners, employees and investors."



COMBAT VETERAN



By way of example it has been noticed by the Fayetteville community that the Fayetteville Observer is demonstrating an inordinate amount of favoritism of certain political candidates over other political candidates.

One example is the Fayetteville Observer's glaring lack of coverage of mayoral candidate Mitch Colvin's criminal record and civil state law business violations as recent as October 12th, 2017 and what, if any, criminal or complaint record of his political opponent Nat Robertson.

It should be manifestly obvious as to why this information would be vitally important to Fayetteville voters. It should also be patently obvious as to why it would be very important for the Fayetteville Observer, as a subsidiary of GateHouse Media, to provide such information.

American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) - ARTICLE I - Responsibility. The primary purpose of gathering and distributing news and opinion is to serve the general welfare by informing the people and enabling them to make judgments on the issues of the time. Newspapermen and women who abuse the power of their professional role for selfish motives or unworthy purposes are faithless to that public trust. The American press was made free not just to inform or just to serve as a forum for debate but also to bring an independent scrutiny to bear on the forces of power in the society, including the conduct of official power at all levels of government.

Society for Professional Journalists - Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information. Journalists should:

- Support the open exchange of views, *even views they find repugnant.*
- Recognize a special obligation to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open and that government records are open to inspection.
- Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.
- Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.
- Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.
- **Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.**
- **Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.**
- **Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.**

It has been my experience that this irresponsible lack of neutrality and balance exhibited by the Fayetteville Observer spans many issues in the Fayetteville community and it is not only I who has observed this as it has been commented upon by *many* others in the community. Anytime I, or others, post a comment in discourse with others to one of Fayetteville Observer's articles that may contain a link to an article from another news outlet with information that the Fayetteville Observer has not reported on, or provides information that does not mesh with Fayetteville Observers' apparent political slant, the staff at Fayetteville Observer deletes or filters out the comment.



COMBAT VETERAN



It is my understanding that to maintain objectivity in journalism, journalists should *present* the facts whether or not they like or agree with those facts. Objective reporting is meant to portray issues and events in a neutral and unbiased manner, regardless of the writers opinion or personal beliefs.

There can be no doubt that vigorous debate in Fayetteville Observer article comments generate interest in the minds of other potential subscribers who just happen to be reading one of the ten free articles provided per month. Ultimately that interest translates into subscriptions sold that benefit GateHouse Media **only** if the potential subscriber is pleased with the experience and has not had their comments spitefully deleted or filtered over some personal agenda by a Fayetteville Observer employee.

There is also no doubt that the deletion and filtering of comments that contain content that should have also been reported on by Fayetteville Observer, but was not, drives potential subscribers, and even current subscribers away which I'm sure is not in the best interest of GateHouse Media's business model.

The Fayetteville Observer is not providing the Fayetteville Community with critical information that certainly goes to the character of a political candidate and as such is very important to the Fayetteville voters. It is these kind of journalistic failures that cause subscription loss and worse yet the loss of the acquirement of new subscriptions as word quickly spreads to potentially new subscribers not to even bother. There can be no doubt that this has a disastrous impact on GateHouse Media's bottom line which as we all know is important to employees', supervisors', owners' paychecks and of course the stockholders of New Media Investment Group, Inc.

Is it not the fulfillment of the needs of a community that generates subscription sales?

And conversely is it not the failure of same that brings about a loss of subscriptions and a failure to garner the maximum amount of subscription sales possible?

Do I incorrectly assume that one of the primary goals of GateHouse Media is to maximize sales so as to maximize dividends to GateHouse Media's shareholders or owners?

Now I am not so ignorant as to believe that I, or others, enjoy an unfettered freedom of speech on a website owned and operated by Gatehouse Media. I, and others, are quite properly restricted by GateHouse Media's rules and I have no problem with fairly established rules.

I can't help but believe however that any abuse of those rules to facilitate a personally held political agenda by a Fayetteville Observer employee would be acceptable to GateHouse Media because of the potential to negatively affect sales and subscription retention.



COMBAT VETERAN



When my comments do not violate any posted rules such as curse words or personal attacks against someone's person, rather than their actions which of course is fair game, and my comments are filtered or deleted for no other reason than a Fayetteville Observer employee's political preference I begin entertaining thoughts of canceling my subscription for unfair corporate practices and vociferously advising the 7,750+/- Followers and 280+/- Friends I'm in daily contact with either personally or on Facebook to cancel their subscriptions also.

In essence, while it may not be required by the Fayetteville Observer to exercise fairness with customers such as me, it is certainly in their best interest, as well as GateHouse Media's, to do so.

Now please understand that I did not make a knee-jerk reaction and tender this missive to you right away in some fit of mindless anger.

On October 10, 2017 at 11:36 am, I contacted the Fayetteville Observer to ask for the supervisor of the Fayetteville Observer's online presence (website/Facebook Page). I was eventually connected to Ms. Beth Hudson. When I asked why my comments were being deleted or filtered I was told that she could find no instance of any such deletion.

I then took the measure of giving her a specific article and specific comment that I had previously used to test the issue and had her monitor the process as I yet again made the exact same comment post.

Ms. Beth Hudson, when faced with the proof of the deletion, attempted to argue that it was a "filtering" and not a deletion. Why she thought that there was a real world functioning difference between filtering and deleting I have no idea. Both result in the comment being hidden from view.

When I asked the reasoning for my comment post being "filtered", effectively deleted, since it violated no rules established by the Fayetteville Observer [GateHouse Media] I was told that it was deleted because they (Fayetteville Observer) could not validate the information in the comment post.

Validate the information in the post? To say I was bewildered would be an understatement. This particular post included a link to a news article that contained a picture of a political candidate associating with a local businessman who had been arrested for pedophilia.

This is another example of information that the Fayetteville Observer failed to include in their news coverage of the area. And with the inclusion of pictorial proof that was already "validated" by a prominent local attorney in the same comment thread who is the father-in-law of the political figure I fail to see just what needed validating.



COMBAT VETERAN



It was at this point that I felt that I was being unethically manipulated by a publication that I had once trusted. I asked Ms. Beth Hudson to provide me with the owner complaint information or process information so I could file a formal complaint.

Ms. Beth Hudson became agitated and told me that she did not know who a customer could file a complaint with right off the top of her head. I told her that I believed that her company policies and procedures manual should have that information and asked her to look it up for me. I received more stuttering and stammering. I asked her if she could at least tell me who is the owner of the Fayetteville Observer. Ms. Beth Hudson reluctantly answered that Fayetteville Observer was owned by GateHouse Media.

I was shocked to find that a supervisor in the Fayetteville Observer's (GateHouse Media's) employment was so ill-trained as to not know such information, or at least be able to quickly locate it. I was eventually transferred to Mr. Matt Leclercq, Executive Editor.

I recounted to Mr. Matt Leclercq what had been discussed with Ms. Beth Hudson and received the same feeble excuse of "validation" issues. Having seen numerous links in article comments by others I inquired if he reviewed every link to FOX News, MSNBC, WRAL CH5 News, WTVD 11 News, or various State of N.C. websites and "validated" them also. Mr. Matt Leclercq hemmed and hawed and never gave a very definitive answer.

Suddenly Mr. Matt Leclercq became agitated and sharply informed me in a rude manner that it was his decision to filter (delete) my comment posts.

I find it quite understandable that the Fayetteville Observer is responsible for the validations of any article that **they** publish but it does not ring true to me that the Fayetteville Observer is responsible for the validations of every story written by anybody. Such a concept is simply nonsense to me and many others in the Fayetteville community. In fact it smacks of unwarranted censorship and manipulation.

Having had enough rudely unreasonable resistance and what was a decidedly unprofessional attitude coupled with a certainty that I was being lied to with regard to the given justification I asked Mr. Matt Leclercq what he thought GateHouse Media would think about his actions.

Mr. Matt Leclercq sharply stated that he controlled whatever he wanted at the Fayetteville Observer and I gathered that his inference was that he did not answer to GateHouse Media and that GateHouse Media didn't supervise or control him despite their ownership of Fayetteville Observer.

Realizing that I was dealing with a toxic employee with obvious loyalty issues regarding GateHouse Media I saw no sense in continuing the conversation with Mr. Matt Leclercq.



COMBAT VETERAN



I told Mr. Matt Leclercq that at this point all I wanted from him was the contact information to file a formal complaint with GateHouse Media. Again I was met with more hemming and hawing about the official corporate complaint process, from Mr. Matt Leclercq this time.

I was just completely stunned that the Executive Editor of a subsidiary of GateHouse Media did not know where a customer would be able to file a formal complaint to the owners of Fayetteville Observer. All that Mr. Matt Leclercq would offer me was to tell me to look on GateHouse Media's website. At a minimum I was expecting a specific name, phone number and mailing address of the appropriate contact at GateHouse Media.

Suddenly, on realizing that I was serious about filing a formal complaint, Mr. Matt Leclercq became calm and contrite acting which instantly caused me to become suspicious. Mr. Matt Leclercq in a placating manner asked me to understand that he feared libel issues regarding links in comments that led to other websites.

Having been a law enforcement officer the majority of my working career has given me a more than sufficient understanding of laws and their applications in real life. I immediately knew that the Fayetteville Observer incurred no realistic liability regarding the content of comments with links that lead to other websites, especially websites that report their sources establishing factual truth. And especially regarding public figures.

Mr. Matt Leclercq went on to assure me that he would not recklessly delete any more of my comments and strove to prove to me that he wasn't deleting all my comments by pointing out some that remained.

It appeared to me that Mr. Matt Leclercq was attempting to at least try and be reasonable and I capitulated with the warning that if the Fayetteville Observer deleted any more of my comments over nothing more than an unethical political slant being forced on the community I would make my formal complaint.

On October 17, 2017, I experienced the Fayetteville Observer filtering (effectively deleting) my comments made during a Fayetteville Observer Facebook Live presentation of the Fayetteville mayoral debate.

Apparently at issue was my inclusion of these links in my comments;

- <http://tptn.fayettevilleforum.net/index.php/2017/10/17/fayetteville-mayoral-candidate-mitch-colvin-price-gouged-parents-deceased-child/>
- <http://tptn.fayettevilleforum.net/index.php/2017/10/14/fayetteville-mayoral-candidate-mitch-colvin-troubling-criminal-record/>

Both articles are supported with source links to N.C. State court documents and the information in those articles are important to Fayetteville Voters. Both articles contained



COMBAT VETERAN



information that had not been reported on by the Fayetteville Observer in a timely manner in this current political season.

I would ask you to review and make a fair and impartial assessment of these articles for yourselves. Keep in mind that the information in these articles has not been in Fayetteville Observer's local coverage and in fact it appears that they are attempting to suppress the information on behalf of mayoral candidate Mitch Colvin which is certainly a violation of journalistic standards of conduct.

If anything the Fayetteville Observer should also be reporting this information themselves in service to the community they propose to support.

In no comment did I use foul language or attack anyone's person. I only attacked actions by political candidates which is quite obviously appropriate.

In Summary

- The censorship actions of the Fayetteville Observer, have caused, and are causing, GateHouse Media to lose current subscribers.
- The censorship actions of the Fayetteville Observer, have caused, are causing GateHouse media to lose potential subscribers.
- The actions of the Fayetteville Observer are politically unethical and journalistically improper.
- The publication, the Fayetteville Observer, owned by GateHouse Media has been hijacked by an internal political agenda that is resulting in a loss of current and potential revenue.
- The publication, the Fayetteville Observer, owned by GateHouse Media is not properly conducting themselves and their reporting in adherence to GateHouse Media published policies.
- The publication, the Fayetteville Observer, owned by GateHouse Media is not properly adhering to standards set forth by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) and the Society for Professional Journalists.
- The publication, the Fayetteville Observer, owned by GateHouse Media is staffed with personnel who are quite ill-trained in GateHouse Media policies and procedures resulting in liability to GateHouse Media and poor customer service.

All I ask in the way of conflict resolution in this matter is simple customer loyalty in the form of fair treatment on comment posting when I and others post a comment that is in adherence with the *current* posting rules. I would not put it past Mr. Matt Leclercq to try and change the rules to facilitate his personal agenda.

I do not think it unreasonable to request and receive a written apology from Mr. Matt Leclercq for his unfair treatment. Mr. Matt Leclercq's tendering of apology without complaint would demonstrate to you that Mr. Matt Leclercq is a rehabilitable employee while a refusal to do so would serve to show you that he is an employee that is too toxic to remain in charge of other



COMBAT VETERAN



employees who he may negatively “infect”, and may already have negatively affected. The results of such employee toxicity quite obviously negatively affects the company profit margin and eventually leads to bankruptcy.

Though these internal matters are clearly your business and none of mine, I would however suggest that you institute mandatory training of all employees of the Fayetteville Observer regarding the policies and procedures established by the owner, GateHouse Media that are to be adhered to.

I would also suggest an audit of Fayetteville Observer’s articles with a totality view towards impartiality, avoidance of favoritism and adherence to long standing journalistic standards. It has been a long-standing complaint of the Fayetteville community as a whole that the Fayetteville Observer has a decidedly liberal political slant. Loss of neutrality = loss of trust = loss of subscribers, both current and potential.

I would think that the institution of this mandatory training would also serve to remind the employees of the Fayetteville Observer that they are no longer an autonomous entity and are now a part of the GateHouse Media family and subject to GateHouse Media rules and regulations.

Checking into this issue may very well result in changes that would substantially affect the company profit margin in a positive manner in this area with increased sales due to an increase in trust.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,



Jerry W. Schrecker, Subscriber

jwschrecker@gmail.com

910 309-9928

CC:

Laurence Tarica, Director
Wesley Robert Edens, Director
Kevin M. Sheehan, Director
Melinda A. Janik, CFO
Peter Newton, CRO
Paul Ameden, VP CIO
Bill Church, VP News
Bernie Szachara, President, Eastern U.S. Publishing Operations
Robert Gruber, Fayetteville Observer Publisher



COMBAT VETERAN

