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Journalism: More Than Just Tweets

There was a panel this past Friday with NPR's Susan Davis and Geoff Bennett. This panel was one of [TWC's professional track activities](#), where you can choose to attend events that cater to your specific professional interests whether that be policy, law, or advocacy.

In my case, this event catered to communications (as well as policy). To be honest I wasn't entirely sure who Susan Davis and Geoff Bennett were, but National Public Radio tends to speak for itself. They were notable for their jobs as correspondents on Capitol Hill and at the White House.



NPR's Susan Davis and Geoff Bennett

Of course they had many insightful things to say about how they first got started, the general rise of national distrust of media, the move from print media to digital, and the surreal nature of having a job that places you in close proximity to political actors. The topics discussed were fascinating in and of themselves, but Geoff Bennett said something that piqued my interest. He noted that a challenging part of being a journalist having a critical lens to determine the important vs. the shiny stories that should/should not be reported with emphasis.

As I began to reflect, I figured this was very much a part of the reason there may be a rising distrust of journalism. Susan Davis and Geoff Bennett spoke multiple times of the rush—the rush to get “the story” out first. It is common that facts and quality are often sacrificed for this rush for output.

When time came for questions, I mentioned the example of the Flint water crisis. It has been around three years, and those living in Flint still do not have guaranteed clean water. There are several members of my family who are still buying bottled water to wash and to cook their meals. Although this story has been ongoing, should it no longer be reported? When is the point that journalists, essentially, decide to move on to other stories or other topics?

The answer I received wasn't entirely satisfactory to me. They both responded with something along the lines of: there are lots of things happening everyday. A lot of things are underreported. If something has not changed enough within a story it is necessary to move on.

When I received this answer it made me think that the issue isn't that the Flint water crisis isn't important, it's that it isn't shiny enough. Maybe it's not happening to the right people. The Flint water crisis doesn't have half the sparkle of one of Trump's controversial tweet storms—something Geoff Bennett has had to cover in his time as a White House correspondent.

Somehow, a tweet from the President can get more press than the fact that a “first

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Journalism: More Than Just Tweets

world country" has allowed a fraction of their population to go without clean water...

Sure, there is something to be said for the fact that Trump's tweets have impact. But outside of the Internet, I really doubt those tweets do anything at all except distract people from the phenomena that is actually occurring right now. I think most people can agree that Trump's stance and way of communication has been pretty unchanged since the beginning of his campaign. That "story" hasn't progressed, but a water crisis could change with enough attention and diligence.

If they would have asked me, I would say that there is always something to report when individuals are lacking clean water in a country that boasts infrastructural superiority to other countries that consistently lack access to water, clean or not.

In short, I think this panel just made me more determined (if I am to enter the world of journalism) to advocate for more long-form, investigative, solution-based journalism. I do not believe it is enough to be a journalist and say, "Look, here is a problem" without also asking how it started, where it came from, and where it is going. To earn trust, I think journalism should expect more than sound bites and screenshots from Twitter.

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