

couriernewsroom.com

A political news site launched in late 2019 that mainly produces positive news coverage of moderate congressional Democrats in competitive districts, without disclosing its partisan agenda.



Proceed with caution: This website fails to meet several basic standards of credibility and transparency.

Score: 57/100

Ownership and Financing

CourierNewsroom.com is owned by Courier Newsroom Inc., which the site describes as a “for-profit media company.” On its Ethics page (not on its About page), the site says at the bottom — after sections on “Ethics,” “Plagiarism,” and “Corrections” — that it is funded by Acronym, which it only describes as a “a 501(c)4 progressive nonprofit organization” and “an investor in multiple for-profit companies in the media and technology space.” One of the technology companies that Acronym owns is a digital strategy firm that works to elect Democrats, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

Acronym states on its website: “We build power and modern infrastructure for a new progressive movement.” Acronym founder Tara McGowan told the online news site Ozy in September 2019 that Acronym, which was founded in 2017, had raised \$18 million by 2018. Ozy reported that in Acronym’s first year, the organization “has quickly become one of the go-to digital organizing forces for everyone from Planned Parenthood and Emily’s List to Everytown for Gun Safety and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.”

McGowan told Bloomberg News in November 2019 that Acronym hoped to raise \$25 million from liberal donors to finance Courier Newsroom and a network of interconnected local sites across the U.S., including Virginia Dogwood, Copper Courier in Arizona, and Up North News in Wisconsin. She said that Acronym has plans to launch sites in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and North Carolina.

McGowan also told Bloomberg News that the Courier Newsroom network seeks to fill a void created by a decline in local news and to reach Democratic voters at a time when, according to McGowan, U.S. President Donald Trump and Republicans are better than the left at reaching people online. “Democrats are losing politically because they have invested in reaching the wrong audiences through the wrong mediums and formats at the wrong times,” McGowan said.

In addition to CourierNewsroom.com and its affiliated state sites, Acronym has invested in for-profit companies including Shadow Inc., a political technology company, and Lockwood Strategy, a digital consulting firm founded by McGowan. Acronym also has an associated political action committee, called Pacronym, which spent nearly \$2.5 million supporting Democratic candidates during the 2018 campaign cycle, according to campaign finance records available on OpenSecrets.org. The New York Times reported in November 2019 that McGowan aims to raise \$75 million for Acronym and Pacronym in the 2020 election cycle.

CourierNewsroom.com does not run advertising.

Lindsay Schrupp, the site’s editor, told NewsGuard in a January 2020 email that the site plans to start running advertising and that it will be “rolling out subscription products, underwriting programs, and events over time for additional revenue.”

Content

CourierNewsroom.com writes about politics in the U.S. from a partisan, pro-Democratic perspective that it does not clearly disclose. On its About page, the site states that it tells “national stories through a local lens,” with the goal of “investing in the work of local journalists across the country” to “positively impact civic participation and build a healthier democracy.”

Courier Newsroom publishes original content and reposts articles from the network’s state affiliates. The site often focuses on Democratic members of the House of Representatives who were elected in 2018 in



Does not repeatedly publish false content (22 points)



Gathers and presents information responsibly (18)



Regularly corrects or clarifies errors (12.5)



Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly (12.5)



Avoids deceptive headlines (10)



Website discloses ownership and financing (7.5)

N/A

Clearly labels advertising (7.5)



Reveals who’s in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest (5)



The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information (5)

Criteria are listed in order of importance. [More information.](#)

members of the House of Representatives who were elected in 2016 in right-leaning swing districts and now face challenging reelection campaigns. Many stories highlight individual Democratic lawmakers and their legislative proposals, with a focus on how their bills could help constituents.

For example, a January 2020 article titled “How This Huge Defense Bill Shows Rep. Jared Golden Delivering on his Promises,” highlighted the Maine Democrat’s work to “improve the lives of service members,” according to the article description of his legislative proposals.

The site is divided into sections covering Safety, Climate, Health, and Politics. Typical articles have run under headlines including “How Trump’s trade war with China hurt New Jersey,” “How the Title X ‘gag order’ is putting your birth control at risk,” and “New Mexico Rep. Torres Small is waging a war on America’s maternal health crisis.”

Credibility

Courier Newsroom’s articles are typically fact-based, citing interviews with politicians, government reports, and reputable media outlets, such as Reuters and The Washington Post. Headlines accurately reflect content.

However, Courier Newsroom often cherry-picks facts to advance a Democratic narrative. Unlike many left-leaning sites, CourierNewsroom.com generally avoids divisive topics such as race, abortion, and immigration. Moreover, many high-profile liberal Democrats, such as Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, are rarely covered, and the site has not extensively covered the impeachment of President Trump.

Instead, the site concentrates on issues that are typically championed by moderate Democrats in swing districts, such as assisting farmers who were hurt by President Trump’s trade war with China, lowering drug prices, and supporting U.S. veterans. The site often presents a one-sided, positive vision of Democratic policies and these politicians, typically leaving out key details that do not advance this narrative — such as mentioning Republicans who may also support these initiatives.

NewsGuard’s review of the site in January 2020 found 25 articles published since the site’s November 2019 launch that covered Democratic bills, framing their efforts in a positive light. No similar articles were published about Republicans in Congress.

For example, a November 2019 article, titled “How two freshman reps from New York are fighting to help women veterans,” focused on a bill sponsored by New York Democratic Reps. Anthony Brindisi and Max Rose that would help female veterans access medical care. “The Deborah Sampson Act will now go to the Republican-controlled Senate, which has become notorious for its refusal to take up legislation passed by the House this year,” the article stated.

Other articles focused on a bill from New Jersey Democratic Rep. Andy Kim that seeks to lower health care costs for seniors, bills sponsored by New Mexico Rep. Xochitl Torres Small to support rural mothers who have limited access to health care, and a bill pushed by Illinois Rep. Lauren Underwood that would “protect Illinois highway funding,” according to the article. All of these articles featured moderate Democrats who represent swing districts.

A January 2020 article, titled “This Bill Could Save You \$3,000 On Your Taxes If You Live In New Jersey,” highlighted how the 2017 tax bill enacted by a Republican Congress and President Trump had caused state taxes to go up for many New Jersey residents. The article quoted Democratic Rep. Tom Malinowski about his plans to try to restore some tax breaks for New Jersey. It did not quote any Republicans or defenders of the 2017 tax measure.

In addition, as of January 2020, Courier Newsroom has spent over \$198,000 on Facebook ads to promote its articles, according to data from Facebook’s Ad Library, a public tool that Facebook created to give researchers “a comprehensive, searchable collection of all ads currently running from across Facebook Products.” Many media companies use Facebook as an advertising tool to sell subscriptions, but Courier Newsroom has done something different — it uses Facebook’s targeted advertising feature to reach the voters who will decide the fate of the politicians Courier Newsroom features.

For instance, from December 2019 to early January 2020, Courier Newsroom spent between \$8,000 and \$10,000 on Facebook

advertisements that highlighted positive stories about Michigan Rep. Elissa Slotkin and targeted voters in Michigan, according to Facebook's Ad Library. Based on Facebook's estimates, these ads reached between 590,000 and 710,000 Facebook users.

Because CourierNewsroom.com is not upfront about its partisan agenda, yet advances that agenda through its story selection and framing, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not gather and present information responsibly and that it does not responsibly handle the difference between news and opinion.

Although CourierNewsroom.com does not publish a corrections policy, the site publishes corrections in the form of a note at the bottom of the story, explaining the error and how it was corrected.

Schrupp, Courier Newsroom's editor, told NewsGuard that the site has been "transparent" about its political perspective. When asked about the site's practice of cherry-picking facts to publish positive stories about Democrats, Schrupp said that "we believe there aren't always two sides to every story, and that an increase in both sides-ism and false equivalency in media has helped normalize extremism, bigotry, and the spread of information not based in fact." The goal of Courier Newsroom, Schrupp said, is to publish journalism "that is thoughtful, informative, and true."

Transparency

Although Courier Newsroom discloses that its main funder Acronym is a "progressive nonprofit organization," it does not provide a full description of Acronym, which is an avowedly political organization with a specific agenda, described by the Center for Responsive Politics as a "dark money" 501(c)(4) non-profit. Nor does the website disclose that it covers news from a left-leaning, partisan perspective. The site's About page describes Courier Newsroom as a "progressive media company." However, this description does not make clear that Acronym and the sites it finances have a partisan agenda. For these reasons, NewsGuard has concluded that the site does not adequately disclose its ownership and sources of financing.

This conclusion is exemplified by the site's description of its mission. In a deceptive November 2019 column that remains on the site's home page, titled "How Can We Save Our Democracy? Start With Local News," Schrupp stated that Courier Newsroom's "mission is about giving people something we can all share: the facts that bind our communities together." Schrupp also wrote that if "local news disappears, so does our democracy," and asserted that Courier Newsroom is "not here to enter a war of who's right, or who should win."

In response to a question from NewsGuard about why Courier Newsroom does not disclose that Acronym (and its associated super PAC, Pacronym) is a major force in Democratic politics, Schrupp said only that "our mission is to encourage civic participation by creating a more informed electorate."

Kyle Tharp, vice president of communications at Acronym, told NewsGuard in an email that it is an unrealistic standard for Courier Newsroom to explain on its site everything that Acronym does. "On its about page, Courier clearly discloses its relationship to ACRONYM, but cannot be responsible for alerting audiences of every aspects of work that one of its investors engages in," Tharp said.

The About page identifies the site's editorial leadership and includes a general email address. However, the site does not disclose the conflict of interest that exists between the editors, who claim only to tell "national stories through a local lens" and to "positively impact civic participation and build a healthier democracy," and the mission of the funders of the site, which is to support certain politicians and policies.

Asked about this, Tharp told NewsGuard that "ACRONYM plays no role in the editorial processes of Courier Newsroom." Tharp also stated that although Acronym helps fund the political work of its affiliated Super PAC, the "digital advertising campaign against Trump is separate and unrelated to Courier."

However, this statement contradicts what McGowan, Acronym's founder, has said publicly about Courier Newsroom's political objectives. Bloomberg News reported in November 2019 that the idea for the project came from a white paper McGowan authored in 2017 called "Rethinking Investing in Media to Build Political Power." She explained to Bloomberg News how Courier Newsroom uses reader data to reach likely voters via targeted Facebook ads.

CourierNewsroom.com articles typically include the name of the writer, along with a biography and link to an archive of past work.

The site does not run advertising.

History

CourierNewsroom.com began publishing in November 2019, six months after Acronym launched its first site, the Virginia Dogwood.

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Send feedback to NewsGuard: [Click Here](#)

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Ownership and Financing

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