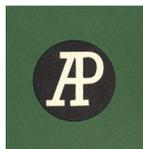

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Connecting

April 3, 2014



Colleagues,

US secretly created 'Cuban Twitter' to stir unrest

That was the headline on a major story disclosed this morning by an Associated Press investigative team that the U.S. Agency for International Development masterminded the creation of a "Cuban Twitter," a communications network designed to undermine the communist government in Cuba, built with secret shell companies and financed through foreign banks.

The project, which lasted more than two years and drew tens of thousands of subscribers, sought to evade Cuba's stranglehold on the Internet with a primitive social media platform.

Click [here](#) for the story, which carried the bylines of **Desmond**



Butler, Jack Gillum and **Alberto Arce**. Contributing to the report were Associated Press researcher **Monika Mathur** in Washington, and AP writers **Andrea Rodriguez** and **Peter Orsi** in Havana. Arce reported from Tegucigalpa, Honduras. (Shared by Paul Colford)

And click [here](#) for a video on the story.

In the photo above, Saimi Reyes speaks during an interview with the AP in Havana. Carmona was a journalism student at the University of Havana when she stumbled onto ZunZuneo. She was intrigued by the service's novelty, and the price. The advertisement said "free messages" so she signed up using her nickname, Saimita. (AP Photo/**Franklin Reyes**)

NCAA confiscates reporter's cat mug

This headline piqued the interest of longtime AP sports writer **Doug Tucker**.

The Wall Street Journal story by Jason Gay began:

This is a story about a cat mug. It is a good-sized cat mug, with room for about 12 ounces of a beverage, and it features 11 illustrations of domestic cats in various poses, including "chase," "sit," "beg," "down" and "fetch." If you do not think that a cat can fetch, you have not been spending enough time with cats. The mug is made by the company Fishs Eddy and it cost me \$16.95. You might think that is a lot to spend on cat mug, but then again, it's a pretty awesome cat mug.



Intrigued? Click [here](#) for the rest of the story.

Doug notes:

"AP was years ahead on this issue. I remember very well the first time I sat down in my court side seat at the NCAA tournament with a cup of something I'd bought on the concourse. Someone swooped down on me as though he'd captured a thief. They took the cup away and told me I could not have it there because it wasn't whatever beverage

company (forget which one) was a "corporate sponsor" of the NCAA. I got a couple of quotes from some NCAA official at the site and wrote a rather lengthy entry for the notebook. I don't know if they appreciated how ridiculous, hypocritical and greedy these things made them look. Maybe they did but just didn't care."

Embarrassing Moment - (involving an AP bureau chief)

Connecting colleague and retired newspaper editor-publisher [Max Thomson](#) was editor of The Mexico Ledger in Missouri, under owner-publisher Bob White (a former AP board director), when this story occurred:

He was the esteemed chief justice of the Missouri Supreme Court. And he gave the funniest speech I ever heard. I do not think that was his intent, but his speech and my reaction to it led to what was the most embarrassing moment of my 37-year newspaper career.

His Honor shall remain anonymous in this story because I do not wish to denigrate a man who was a fine public servant.

This story involves the U.S. Constitution, the Missouri Press Association, the Gateway Arch, two Missouri newspaper publishers and an Associated Press bureau chief. It's a small miracle any and all have survived.



The Chief Justice was appointed by Gov. John Ashcroft in 1986 to serve as chairman of a statewide committee to direct the bicentennial celebration of the ratification of the U.S. Constitution the following year.

He took his assignment seriously, touring the state to tell any and all that Missouri's commemoration would be the best in the country, topping anything done for the 1976 bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence.

Bill Bray, long-time executive director of the Missouri Press Association, invited the judge to share his plans with a gathering of the state's editors and publishers. I can only guess that Bray figured he could get the state's newspapers to promote His Honor's plan.

The fellowship part of the program was excellent. Open bars tend to make it so.

Jules Molenda, then publisher of the Sedalia Democrat; **Paul Stevens**, then the Kansas City bureau chief for the Associated Press and now disseminator of this newsletter; and I set up shop at a table toward the back of the room, near the door. It was the only good choice we made that evening.

The mandatory vulcanized chicken was served before Bray introduced the speaker.

The Chief Justice waxed on for more than 45 minutes about the acknowledged beauty of the Constitution, focusing unnecessarily for those in the room, on the First Amendment. More accustomed to speaking from behind the bench where he could command the attention of his courtroom, this podium engagement proved a challenge. Eyes rolled. Bodies fidgeted. Fifteen minutes in, His Honor had transported everyone in the room to the Land of Nod.

It was the speech we all have been forced to endure many times. The verbiage was, well, verbose. The gestures were overly grand. The speech was simply God awful, but with a twist. And at some point, the Chief Justice went off the rails. His comments teetered between the irrational and the senile.

In the back of the room, Stevens, Molenda and I exchanged puzzled glances, fascinated by the soaring, disjointed oratory and by how few in the room seemed awake enough to notice. Somewhere in the midst of a bizarre remedial lesson on the First Amendment, our fascination fostered quiet snickers.

Then he delivered the payoff. His Honor disclosed his plans for a grand celebration of the Bicentennial of the Constitution.

First, he said, he was contacting Missouri manufacturers to get bids on an American flag that would be two, three, maybe four times bigger than any flag ever produced. His personal excitement about the prospect pushed his oratory into another, still funnier, gear. As I recall, even the pitch of his voice moved octaves higher.

At the back of the room, our snickers became muffled laughter. It was still suppressible. It would not remain so for long.

What to do with the largest American flag ever made? He had a plan, he said, which was sure to bring national network television attention to Missouri.

On July 4, 1987, the Gateway Arch would provide the stage for his salute.

These quotes may not be exact, but the memory of what came next has been seared in my brain.

"A squadron of Chinook helicopters," His Honor said, his arms suddenly extending skyward as if he was directing a heavenly choir. "They will lift Old Glory out of the vast wasteland that is East St. Louis, fly it majestically across the Mississippi River and hang that puppy from the top of Gateway Arch."

At the back of the room, water glasses were spilled and silverware flew from the table to the floor.

The three of us were laughing out loud now. I was laughing so uncontrollably that I was brought to tears. And it was as if the clamor, not the over-the-top rhetoric, had brought others in the room back into consciousness. Through my tears, I could see heads snap around and disapproving glares cast. Bray's frown of condemnation was unmistakable.

I missed the rest of the Chief Justice's speech as I was the first to

flee out the door. Molenda and Stevens followed. It was a short distance down the hallway and to the bar where we continued to laugh so hard we could not speak. We had to write our drink orders for the waitress. It took a good half hour to quell the laughter and the tears. Sudden gestures or the words "squadron of Chinooks" or "vast wasteland" would trigger new outbreaks.

The judge's speech complete, other, more professional, newspaper professionals joined us in the bar. They all wanted to know what was so funny. They must not have heard the same speech.

Weeks later, Stevens triggered a new bout of uncontrolled laughter when he sent a small plastic replica of the Gateway Arch complete with a tiny paper American flag suspended from a toothpick across the top of the Arch. I kept the remembrance in my office the rest of my career.

Molenda, Stevens and I did attend state press association functions after that memorable night, but never again sat at the same table. Bray did not ask Molenda or me to serve on any statewide committees or take leadership positions in the press association. A few years later, when Thomson Newspapers (no relation) moved me to Pennsylvania, I must have missed Bray's call wishing me farewell.

Oh, and if Old Glory were hung from the top of the Gateway Arch on July 4, 1987, I missed the story.

Connecting mailbox

Any of you ever move from AP to running a weekly newspaper? Connecting colleague [Jack Limpert](#) would like to know. He writes:

After working at UPI, and before going into magazines, I edited weekly papers in Michigan and California and enjoyed it. With so many daily newspaper jobs disappearing, I'd like to do a post for the About Editing and Writing website (that Mike Feinsilber and I do at jacklimpert.com) about the rewards of editing a weekly. It's not the fast-paced schedule of lots of wire service and daily newspaper jobs, and it's not the monthly schedule where you seem to wait forever for your work to appear. At a weekly, you have time to think--about half the week is pretty low-key. Then you get the paper out, read it, and go on to the next issue.

Have any of your readers left the AP to edit a weekly? It'd be great if Mike and I could add some first-person experiences to a post about what it's like.

Click [here](#) for Jack's email address and [here](#) for Mike's email address.



Welcome to Connecting

[Max Jones](#) - Editor, Terre Haute (Ind.) Tribune-Star

Stories of interest

[AP attempts to explain differences in its poll, Washington Post-ABC News poll on Obamacare](#)

(Mark Mittelstadt)

Polls often diverge by a few points, but it's rare to see well-respected polls come to opposing conclusions about the public's take on an issue. In the last week, however, an Associated Press-GfK poll found support for President [Barack Obama](#)'s health care overhaul at a new low while a [Washington Post-ABC News](#) poll showed it had hit a new high.

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[Brad Foss promoted to AP deputy business editor](#)



In his new role, Foss will shape the daily business report and work with the department's editors to deliver even more exclusives and ambitious enterprise stories. He will remain based in Washington, D.C.

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2014 Peabody winners announced

The 2014 Peabody Awards were announced on Wednesday, and CBS News' "One-on-One with Assad," WBZ-TV's Boston Marathon bombings coverage, CNN, NBC News and Al Jazeera America's "Fault Lines" were among the winners. Former NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw will also be honored with an individual award.

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Salt Lake Tribune braces for more cuts as owner kills digital initiative (Bill Beecham)

The Salt Lake Tribune's top editor said Wednesday the newspaper was preparing for sizable budget cuts after its corporate owner killed a digital initiative once considered central to an evolving business strategy. New York-based newspaper chain Digital First Media announced it is closing [Project Thunderdome](#), an experimental news-sharing arrangement involving up to 75 of its newspapers. Thunderdome, launched in late 2011 to centralize key parts of national news gathering and production, is being eliminated in a larger quest to shave more than \$100 million in a companywide initiative dubbed "Catalyst."

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A life in photography took John Alley around the world

As a boy of 9 growing up in a small town in Michigan, John Alley picked up his mother's Kodak folding camera. It began a long and storied life in making pictures. "This was his awakening into photography," said Jim Mullaly, a friend of 20 years. "I remember him telling me, 'The next thing you know, people were becoming interested in my photography.'"

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A Reporter Clutches Life After a Loss That Hits Home

Habib Zahori: KABUL, Afghanistan - I once asked my mother sarcastically why she and my dad had six children. She looked at me patiently and said, "Because we were not sure that all of you would survive." My dad once told me that he was sick of Afghanistan because he could hardly remember going to bed and starting the next day without the news of violence.

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Shared Service Agreement limits in the crosshairs

The National Association of Broadcasters [is hinting](#) that it might sue to block Federal Communications Commission rules approved earlier this week that bar broadcasters from owning multiple television stations in the same market. The threat comes as congressional Republicans [push legislation](#) that would prevent the FCC from taking action against such arrangements.

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Oops, Sorry for Being So Creepy

Soll Sussman notes on Facebook: The "Linda Ellerbee in the A.P. Dallas bureau" telex meltdown never dies...

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Minneapolis Newspaper Gets a New Life, but I Remember the Old One

By now it's a familiar story: a once-mighty regional newspaper is brought low by punishing economics and a series of owners who could not change that math, and is now being scooped up by the local rich guy. In the instance of The Star Tribune in Minneapolis. Glen Taylor, who owns a vast array of businesses -including pro basketball's Minnesota Timberwolves, an egg producer, a medical device company and a host of printing operations - is making a bid to add the dominant local paper in the Twin Cities to his holdings.

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Let's get ready to rumble: Beware the too-quiet newsroom (Tom Slaughter)

In "The Big Sleep," the butler has the memorable line. A confusing film, "The Big Sleep" stars Humphrey Bogart as private detective Philip Marlowe. In the opening scene, Marlowe visits the mansion of the infirm General Sternwood who hires him to resolve some messy family matters. As Marlowe is leaving, he is stopped by the butler, Norris, who says to him, "Mrs. Rutledge would like to see you."

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Jack Mirkinson: What I Read

How do people deal with the torrent of information pouring down on us all? What sources can't they live without? We regularly reach out to

prominent figures in media, entertainment, politics, the arts, and the literary world to hear their answers. This is drawn from a phone conversation with Jack Mirkinson, Senior Media Editor at The Huffington Post.

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[Hunter S. Thompson to join Kentucky Journalism Hall of Fame](#)

The late Thompson will be inducted into the Kentucky Journalism Hall of Fame, run by the University of Kentucky's School of Journalism and Telecommunications, on April 29.

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['Miracle of Father Kapaun' wins Christopher Award](#)

The "Miracle of Father Kapaun" was written by Roy Wenzl and Travis Heying of The Wichita Eagle. It was published in 2013 following an award-winning series in 2009 in The Eagle and Kansas.com.

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[Northeast Ohio Media Group Knows It Has a Typo Problem](#)

Group Vice President of Content Chris Quinn says in a memo to staff: "We hear from people about typos every day. They ask us why they should take us seriously if we can't catch tiny spelling errors...It's a genuine crisis, and it threatens our long-term success."

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Breaking News Staffer of the quarter (Valerie Komor)

Colleagues,

At the end of January, a fierce winter storm tore across the South. The result: Gridlock. Thousands of trapped motorists. Children camped out in schools overnight. Political finger-pointing.

Atlanta-based BNS **Jeff Martin**, who works an early-morning shift, served as a main anchor of the AP's storm coverage.

As he left Monday afternoon, so did thousands of others who work in downtown Atlanta. After several hours, he realized he couldn't get home. Martin turned around and headed back to the bureau.

With all hotel rooms downtown booked, Martin spent the next two

nights sleeping in the bureau, writing, reporting and leading AP's coverage across platforms to capture how about 2 inches of snow brought a major American metro area to its knees.

As a political firestorm raged over government's storm response, Martin helped research weather forecasts, dispelling the governor's initial claim that forecasters got it wrong, leading to the gridlock.

Only a couple of South Desk staffers could make it to the office those days. That left Martin to coordinate coverage of a top national story with his news editor, as well as South Desk managers and staffers, and format leaders who were all working from home. He is a two-state BNS, so he also had to help coordinate storm coverage in neighboring Alabama, which saw similar weather-related problems, just on a slightly smaller scale.

AP's storm coverage received great national play. Scenes of a major American city frozen in gridlock by 2 inches of snow captured the imagination of the country.

South Desk managers and staffers all praised Martin's efforts to coordinate coverage across platforms - especially with the vast majority of the Georgia bureau and South Desk scattered across the metro area.

For his massive effort to keep AP competitive on a major national story with significant logistical hurdles, Martin wins BNS of the Quarter for the first quarter of 2014.

Honorable Mention:

On several occasions this winter, North Carolina BNS **Skip Foreman** played a key role in enhancing AP's coverage of Charlotte and the western part of the state. For example, at the height of Panthers fever for the NFL playoffs, Foreman wrote a story about an Army sergeant in Afghanistan who had received a package of Panthers gear from the coach. Skip used Skype and email to interview the man. But Foreman really shined when four days of crippling winter weather hit the Carolinas during the second week of February. He helped the news editor identify key coverage area, wrote/edited storm vignettes, and penned a story about how businesses were scrambling to be ready for Valentine's Day. He did all of this while juggling his other night BNS duties for both states.

Brian Carovillano

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Subject: Best of the States, No. 124

Colleagues,

In 2010, while Democrats were focused on winning President Obama's re-election and increasing their majority in the Senate, Republicans were quietly working to gerrymander House districts across the country in their favor. Their strategy: To use the 2010 Census and a few key statehouse legislative races in a dozen states that year to redraw congressional districts.

The approach worked, resulting in an electoral map that packed Democrats into as few districts as possible while ensuring a GOP majority in a larger number of districts, all but ensuring that the GOP will retain control of the House in this year's midterm elections and possibly for a decade or more beyond that.

This effort, conducted largely out of the public eye, was chronicled this week by Washington reporter **Stephen Ohlemacher**, who worked with **Michelle Minkoff** and **Dan Kempton** of the Interactive team, as well as AP reporters across all 50 states, for a comprehensive look at how Republicans had strategically positioned themselves to gain seats in Congress. Their work set the stage for coverage of this year's mid-term elections.

The redistricting project, which included Ohlemacher's national story, as well as 50 state-specific pieces, a data-rich interactive, graphics, photos and a dozen explanatory sidebars and glances, represents the latest win in our efforts to leverage AP's national footprint to offer distinctive and exclusive content to state and national audiences simultaneously. This was a true "only from AP" project because the analysis and all of the content was driven by proprietary data gathered and compiled from all 50 states as part of AP's election services.

Ohlemacher began by analyzing voting data generated by the AP's elections research department. He came to the conclusion that voters didn't choose a divided government in 2012. The election was a Democratic wave. Democratic House candidates got 1.4 million more votes than their Republican opponents in 2012. Obama and Democratic House candidates won the total vote in several states that sent overwhelmingly Republican delegations to Congress.

So how did Republicans achieve a 33-seat majority in the House? More data analysis, interviews with political operatives from both parties at the national level and in a half dozen states led to an unmistakable conclusion: Through redistricting, Republicans had successfully tilted playing for control of the House in their favor.

And in fact, the redistricting further polarized voters and politicians. Ohlemacher's reporting explained to readers in simple terms the demographic explanations behind the partisan divide over issues like health care, minimum wage. The team also brought in census data to add additional texture and context to the analysis.

While honing his own story and sidebars to guide readers through the issue, Ohlemacher also worked with AP reporters in every state to give readers another access point to the project: a more granular, state-specific view of the GOP strategy in each state. Sacramento reporter Juliet Williams contributed a story explaining how California and five other states have turned to commissions to take some of the partisanship and incumbent protections out of redistricting.

Minkoff and West Interactive Editor Dan Kempton teamed up to produce an interactive explainer providing a data-driven, visual deep dive on the topic. And Keith Collins of digital products created an AP Big Story page that combined text, photo, video and interactive elements into a multimedia showcase demonstrating the depth and reach of AP's multi-format journalism on this story.

The package's success was overwhelming. It showed up on at least 94 front pages on Monday, including both Ohlemacher's main story and a handful of the state stories. Politico's Playbook promoted it on both Saturday and Sunday and Ohlemacher was interviewed Monday on NPR's nationally syndicated "Here & Now."

For their exclusive, data-driven reporting, and for driving an effort that resulted in AP's ownership of the topic across all 50 states-- a tidal wave of content that further displayed how indispensable AP is to its members and clients - Ohlemacher, Kempton and Minkoff win this week's \$300 Best of the States prize.

New this week: Other work that impressed the judges ...

Justin Pritchard, transportation reporter, Los Angeles, for reporting that the car crash that killed "Fast & Furious" actor Paul Walker last fall was caused by speed alone (up to 94 mph), not mechanical failure of the Porsche driven by a friend of Walker's. It took TMZ and the LA Times nearly an hour to match Pritchard's APNewsBreak, which was the result of Pritchard's source development that has yielded other scoops in the wake of Walker's death. Not only was Pritchard first, his story provided details from authorities' official report no one else matched for hours because the report had not been officially released.

Paul Stevens
Connecting newsletter
stevenspl@live.com

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