

# What Andy Rooney might say about downfall of '60 Minutes'

BY BEN FISHEL  
Los Angeles Times

The turmoil engulfing CBS News and "60 Minutes" has left me wondering what my grandfather Andy Rooney would make of it all.

Rooney died in 2011 after more than three decades as a fixture of the newsmagazine, and with each passing year I find myself wishing we could hear one more of his droll observations about the state of the world. He had a gift for taking something maddening, absurd or just confusing and reducing it to a simple truth. Unfortunately, there is nothing particularly funny about what is happening to American journalism today.

The recent upheaval at CBS illustrates a troubling trend. Following Paramount's merger with Skydance in 2024, major changes have swept through the network, including the leadership and editorial structure of "60 Minutes," long regarded as one of the most respected news programs in American television.

The shakeup has triggered concerns among journalists and former staff about the future editorial independence of the network and whether corporate and political pressures are beginning to shape newsroom decisions.

At the heart of the concern is a question that should matter to everyone, regardless of politics: Who controls the news?

For generations, American journalism operated with an understanding that owners owned the company, but journalists decided what stories were covered. That firewall was never perfect, but it existed. Increasingly, it appears to be eroding.

What is happening at CBS is not an isolated incident. It is part of a broader assault on independent journalism.

President Donald Trump has spent years attacking the press, branding journalists "the enemy of the people" and dismissing unfavorable reporting as "fake news." But the rhetoric has often been accompanied by action. His administration has sued major news organizations, jailed journalists, restricted

the Pentagon press corps, threatened to revoke broadcast licenses, used the Federal Communications Commission to investigate newsrooms, triggered the firing of late-night talk show hosts, gutted the Voice of America and worked to weaken independent journalism wherever it exists. The pattern is difficult to ignore: discredit the press, intimidate the press and ultimately control the press.

I witnessed this firsthand. I spent nearly a decade working at NPR before being laid off after Congress voted to eliminate federal funding for public broadcasting after years of political attacks on the institution. Regardless of where one stands politically, this effort demon-

strated how vulnerable independent journalism can become when it is portrayed as an enemy rather than a public service. My grandfather understood that vulnerability.

Most remember Andy Rooney for his closing commentaries on "60 Minutes," where he offered humorous observations on everything from junk drawers to doorknobs. Before TV made him famous, he was a reporter and war correspondent. His first journalism job was with Stars and Stripes, the military newspaper he served during World War II.

For more than a century, Stars and Stripes has operated under congressional protections designed to guarantee editorial independence from the military chain of command. Earlier this year, the Trump administration announced plans to bring the publication under direct editorial control to eliminate what officials described as "woke distractions."

Critics warned that such a move would transform an independent newsroom into a government public relations operation. The proposal fits a familiar pattern: Institutions that provide independent information are viewed not as assets but as obstacles.

A free press is not a luxury. It is one of the mechanisms by which citizens hold powerful people accountable. The public cannot evaluate leaders, policies or wars if the information reaching them is filtered through political or corporate interests.

Rooney rarely made himself the story, and he believed deeply in journalism and in the responsibility that comes with informing the public.

On that issue, I do not think he would be silent today.

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# A confusing trade policy just won't work

Bloomberg Opinion Editorial

Recurring legal setbacks haven't deflected the White House from its plan to impose a worldwide tariff regime. Whether the fourth variant of this protectionist strategy, proposed last week, will fare better in the courts than its predecessors is doubtful. What's certain is that it will cause yet more disruption, compound the economic damage already done and further harm U.S. relations with its allies.

To recap, the Supreme Court invalidated the administration's "Liberation Day" tariffs in February, ruling that they misapplied federal law. Last month, the U.S. Court of International Trade ruled that the next iteration, so-called Section 122 tariffs set at a flat 10% rate to address a "balance of payments" problem, failed because there is in fact no balance-of-payments problem (under floating exchange rates, external payments always balance). These tariffs are due to expire in any case next month.

Undeterred, the administration has also promised specific Section 301 tariffs, which require a country-by-country determination of unfair trade practices; several investigations are underway. Again, though, the courts are likely to intervene, because the policy's encompassing purpose doesn't accord with its narrow statutory rationale.

The new idea is to apply Section 301 tariffs much more broadly in retaliation against trading partners that, according to the administration, buy goods made with forced labor - not because this violates human rights, by the way, but because it gives them an unfair competitive advantage. More than 80 countries stand accused of this malpractice and could face tariffs of 10% or 12.5%, depending on whether they have a ban that they fail to "effectively enforce" or no ban at all.

Canada, for instance,

**U.S. IMPORTERS AND TRADING PARTNERS MUST BE CLOSE TO DESPAIR. THREATS ARE MADE, DEALS ARE ANNOUNCED, BUT NOTHING IS EVER SETTLED.**

prohibited imports made with forced labor starting in 2020, but U.S. officials say it isn't serious about enforcement. Nor is anybody else, apparently. According to the U.S. trade representative, most of the world enables forced labor at home or abroad - which gives the U.S. grounds to impose a new tariff of at least 10% on countries accounting for 99% of its imports.

The idea isn't to add new tariffs to those already proposed, but to replace the ones that have been voided - and indeed reversed, if importers' efforts to claim refunds succeed. If the new plan goes forward after a comment period, and assuming it isn't neutered by further complications, the courts might be skeptical once more. The plan's official purpose is transparently a feint, another effort to displace Congress from its constitutional function of setting taxes.

Amid this relentless confusion, U.S. importers and trading partners must be close to despair.

Threats are made, deals are announced, but nothing is ever settled. If, despite everything, the administration's plan for managed trade should eventually cohere, that would be no win. The evidence is clear that its tariffs will raise prices for U.S. consumers and producers, hold back competition and growth, and leave the trade deficit unchanged. For the economy's sake and as a matter of cold political calculation, the White House should quietly pause, and then forget, this entire agenda.



People wait in line outside Katz's Delicatessen in New York City. Not everyone in America's biggest city finds standing in line to be a chore. The power of social media trends means that for some, waiting for hours is an attraction. ANGELA WEISS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES TNS

# The influencer economy in America has crossed the line

BY ALLISON SCHRAGER  
Bloomberg Opinion

Saturdays in Greenwich Village require contending with the lines. Starting at 9 a.m., you see blocks-long queues of people waiting for all sorts of things: bagels, pastries, pizza, soggy sandwiches, premium frozen yogurt with candy on it. Even if you don't want to, you will get swept up in a line, because they take over the sidewalks.

To be honest, I don't mind. The lines are the visible representation of capitalism at work. Commerce, meritocracy, the fruits of technological innovation - all are on display, thanks to the rise of the influencer economy.

I'm also aware that all these people aren't waiting for the food, exactly. The lines exist because someone posted a short video saying this French dip will change your life or this dotcake is the best in the city. The line-waiter wants to get that sandwich or cake so they can share their experience and grow their audience, or maybe just gain the approval of their network.

According to one survey, 60% of Generation Z - and

48% of millennials - say they waited in line for more than 30 minutes to eat a specific food in the last year. Most say they'd do it again, and that at least part of the motivation was to post on social media.

All of which is revealing about the economy. Inequality has become more obvious to everyone. There's an hours-long line for one pizza place, while the struggling shop around the corner (whose pizza is just as good) has few customers. Getting the influencers' approval is a matter of luck and knowing who to target. The influencer economy itself also has a winner-takes-all element, with some influencers earning high six figures while most earn nothing.

That said, it's worth noting that the influencer economy is an improvement on what came before. I recently reread a decades-old cover story in New York magazine about the young women, dubbed "Power Girls," who controlled "much of Manhattan's trendiest nightlife" in the late 1990s. They were the original influencers. High-heeled, attached to their flip phones, and with bleached and straightened hair, they owned PR firms that could

make or break a business. They could draw up a guest list for a launch party (and see that it got covered in the New York Post), get a celebrity to go to a restaurant or club, and then make sure it had a line out of the door.

These women all shared two characteristics: They were young and extremely well-connected. It was a rare and powerful combination. There are a lot of young people in the workforce, but few are also born into the kind of wealthy New York family that confers access to and even power over A-listers at an early age.

Back then, the internet was still young and there was no social media. People learned about new products or hot places by reading reviews or stories in newspapers or magazines - or better yet, about a rich or famous person enjoying them in the gossip columns.

Now the world is different. Social media has democratized information, and influencers have largely replaced PR people. Today's power influencers are also young, but they might come from anywhere. They don't need wealth or connections.

All they need is a phone,

a little charisma, a loud voice, and a willingness to document 90% of their waking hours. About 75% of Gen Z/millennials say being a "content creator" is a viable career, and 45% say they are creators, most as a hobby.

It is a much more democratic way to wield power. Audience size is critical; you must court an economically diverse population. Whereas those "Power Girls" had to know how to please only a relatively small subset of the right people.

The displacement of nepo PR people by influencers offers a preview of how the economy is changing. Public relations jobs still exist, but technology has made the narrow skills of the Power Girls less valuable. The influencer economy is more accessible and employs more people, but is also more chaotic and uncertain. If a brand works with influencers, it is not cheap or guaranteed to work, but it is still cheaper than hiring a PR firm used to be.

Influencing is still a winner-take-all market, like much else in the U.S. economy. But who the winners are, and who they need to please, has become more democratic. Such is the nature of technological change: Almost everyone laments the jobs it destroys, but few appreciate the ones it creates.

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