



As an attorney specializing in media law, Dan Byron is a firm believer that newspapers are an integral part of American democracy. He has been a faithful subscriber to his hometown newspaper, the *Plain Dealer & Sun*, all his adult life. —Staff Photo by Bryce Mayer

Defender of the First Amendment

NV native continues sterling efforts as media attorney

During his 50 years as an attorney involved primarily in media and communications law, Dan Byron has been a hugely effective defender of freedom of the press.

He has even gone overseas for extended stays multiple times where he has worked to bolster free speech in areas where that concept of liberty is practically nonexistent.

The North Vernon native has found the going a bit easier in making sure freedom of the press is not eroded in the United States, where he has done the bulk of his work and continues to do so in semi-retirement at the age of 82.

In the last three-and-a-half years, however, the assaults he has seen on the First Amendment in America are like nothing he has experienced in his five decades representing broadcast outlets and newspapers.

“I’m very concerned about President Trump’s attacks on the media,” Byron said. “It’s very alarming.”

American presidents have always criticized the press, but the current president has taken that criticism to a completely different level that Byron and many others believe is dangerous. Freedom of the press is at serious risk, they say, because of Trump’s crusade to discredit the media and his creation of a climate of hostility against journalists that is unparalleled in American history. His

EDITOR’S NOTEBOOK



Bryce Mayer

words have also had a chilling effect worldwide, giving cover to authoritarian governments that harshly treat journalists with imprisonment or worse when they report stories that leaders don’t like.

For example, Byron points out, the Trump administration has given cover to the Saudi Arabia government for the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi last year.

“That murder was obviously a state act,” Byron said. “The fact that our own country went along with the Saudi government’s story, not our own intelligence reports, and is not holding Saudi Arabia responsible is very troubling.”

Byron has traveled to the African continent before — Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, to be specific — to work for press freedom, as well as Asia — in Mongolia.

Since the law firm where he is a partner will soon be the largest law firm in the world, maybe Byron will make his presence felt again internationally.

He joined the firm, in recent years known as Bingham Greenebaum

Doll, in 1969. The Indianapolis-based firm is merging with Dentons and Cohen & Grigsby, a move that is expected to be finalized next month.

“One of my sons was kidding me that they’ll probably open an office in North Korea and send me there since my specialties are media law and freedom of speech. If they do, I won’t be tearing any posters off walls,” Byron related.

One of Byron’s long-time law partners, Sue Beesley, also from North Vernon, recently retired from the firm where her areas of expertise were government and bond work.

Unlike Beesley, Byron chooses to continue working — though now just for half days on three days a week.

Two years ago, Byron was presented the Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame Distinguished Service Award for his great work in protecting journalists in their many investigative efforts and in holding governments accountable for their actions, both in the America and abroad.

His love for freedom of the press and the law was nurtured by his family while growing up in North Vernon. His mother, Helen, who worked as a reporter at *The North Vernon Sun* in the 1930s, and his father, Paul, encouraged him to become a lawyer. A 1955 North Vernon High School graduate, Byron was so focused on work-

ing toward a career in law that he would sometimes ask one of North Vernon’s most prominent attorneys, Harold McConnell, to let him do his homework at McConnell’s law office. McConnell obliged Byron more than once.

Byron went on to get his law degree at Indiana University and was admitted to the Indiana Bar in 1962. He then served in the U.S. Army with the Junior Advocate General’s Corps then, after his discharge, served as U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Indiana before joining his current firm, then known as Bingham and McHale, where he quickly started concentrating on media law.

He and his wife, the former Lynne Sutherland, have two sons, Michael, also an attorney, and Craig, a college professor; and three grandchildren.

Byron still gets back to North Vernon on occasion, as he did earlier this month, though not as often as he did before his brother, Billy, passed away four-and-a-half years ago.

“I just visited the graves of my brother and parents at St. Mary’s Cemetery,” he said. “And I stopped by to see some friends here. North Vernon has been good to me.”

And Byron has been good to the First Amendment. Of that all Americans, not just journalists, should be thankful.