November 2017 | Lexington, Virginia

The lyf so short, the news so longe to reade! Staying on top of news in Washington, DC, is essential for success in government and politics, especially on Capitol Hill. Being informed requires perseverance and experience. But it also requires efficiency: What should you read every day versus what should you read only occasionally or on days when you have extra time? The answers are below. But without doubt, some things you should read every day — YES: Every. Day.

Time to wake up! If you only read the news once a day, do it in the morning, and do it with the following FIVE news sources:

1. The Washington Post, the New York Times, and/or Wall Street Journal. Broadsheet journalism at its finest. Any of these sources should be checked daily for breaking news and leading stories. Browse inside the (virtual) pages as far as you can get. [I’ve read the Times and the Post for decades now, and they have taught me much about what I know about the world — some of which I read about so long ago, it now qualifies as history.] Also take a regular look at the Washington Post’s Monkey Cage blog and Vox’s Mischiefs of Faction, forums for political scientists to contribute commentaries on current political topics rooted in the latest academic research.

2. Politico Huddle. The Huddle is Politico’s excellent aggregation of top stories about Congress from major and minor news sources alike, from the New York Times to The Hill. Read or subscribe to their morning briefing here: http://www.politico.com/tipsheets/huddle.

3. Roll Call. The newspaper of record for Capitol Hill since 1955. Roll Call is very much inside baseball for those who follow Congress, but it captures many details of what bills are moving, what policy controversies are driving the day, and broader trends and tidbits that keep you informed about Congress. Read or subscribe to their daily updates here: http://www.rollcall.com/.

4. NPR Morning Edition/NPR News. Covering breaking news as well as longer thought pieces, the stories are reasonable and well-reported, and they have fascinating “magazine” type human interest stories or pieces on society, art, and culture. NPR is simply part of life among the serious, the cultured, and the informed. Pick up an FM radio or listen to your local affiliate online here: https://www.npr.org/.

5. Axios AM. Run by W&L alumnus Mike Allen (class of 1986), Axios is currently the best aggregator of information that is most likely to capture the major events and players in politics for the day. Follow links for more in-depth articles, or just read the “Sound Smart” summaries for key insights driving the news. Sign-up for it to arrive in your inbox: https://www.axios.com/axios-am.

READ, REFRESH, REPEAT. Throughout the day, check-in with any and all of the above to stay in touch with what’s going on. You don’t want to get caught uninformed!

Your Work Is Not Done! Political Insider Sources for Congress. If you work on the Hill or have to follow it closely, you have even more essential reading, which might not be every day, but definitely regularly:

- C-Span. Gavel-to-gavel video coverage of the House and Senate, political events around Washington, and excellent call-in programs. Not always the most exciting television, but C-Span is one of the single greatest contributions to democratic governance.

- CQ Magazine. In-depth reporting on policy, politics, and procedure. Excellent current reporting and an invaluable resource for conducting research. CQ keeps excellent score sheets on status of bills and congressional action. Available free behind the Leyburn firewall.
Professor Alexander’s Daily News Diet for DC Professionals

- **National Journal Daily.** Similar to CQ, but with greater attention to the daily goings-on on Capitol Hill and pertaining to Congress. Excellent in-depth Hill journalism, as well as the Hotline and other sources on special topics. Available free behind the Leyburn firewall.

- **The Hill.** Like Roll Call, but often a little gossipier, dedicated coverage of Capitol Hill and DC goings on.

- **Congressional Record – Daily Digest.** It was said of Lyndon Johnson, on his path to becoming “Master of the Senate,” that he read the *Congressional Record* every day (Caro 2003, 222). Published each day the chambers are in session, the *Congressional Record* is the record of all the bills introduced, committee hearings, major legislative action, and word-for-word transcript of the House and Senate floor. Fortunately, for us today, there is the *Daily Digest*, a compressed version of the *Record*, which allows you to cut to the most important parts, including the daily calendar for each chamber. Click “Daily Digest” and go from there: [https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record](https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record).

**Additional Good Sources.** Swap out any of the above for one of the following, or peruse these occasionally when looking for more sources or different perspectives on a particular event or topic. In alphabetical order:

- **BBC News.** A global perspective on the United States and the world.

- **Bloomberg News.** News without noise. Breadth and depth on topics across the board.

- **The Economist.** A gold standard of thorough, comprehensive global and national reporting.

- **Morning Consult - Washington.** A very good aggregator site that has a good sixth-sense for what is important to decision-makers in Washington.

- **PBS NewsHour.** Possibly the best television news and analysis currently on the market, a mainstay of PBS viewers since it broke onto the scene during the Watergate era. Airs every evening. A great way to end the day.

- **Real Clear Politics.** Another excellent aggregator of major news resources, more comprehensive than it is focused.

- **Sabato’s Crystal Ball.** Rely on this heavily during political campaign season. Comprehensive analysis on elections around the country, out of the University of Virginia.

**Social media.** It changes constantly, can be extremely untrustworthy, and suffers from confirmation bias. But see something you like? Follow individual reporters, experts, organizations, and more on whatever your preferred platform – Twitter, Facebook, etc. However, social media is NOT a substitute for professional journalism, such as represented by those outlets listed above. Read social media with skepticism and always confirm everything with reliable, external sources.

**Notice something missing?** Yes, it’s cable news. Over the past two decades, the cable news networks have become increasingly sensationalist, shallow, commercialized, partisan, and generally just bunk. Don’t waste your time or insult your intelligence by tuning them in. If cable news is ever worth while, it is only when you need live updates on stories breaking in real-time, or if someone you know happens to be on it.

**Liberal bias?** Don’t believe the hype. The idea that the news media are biased toward liberalism is a red herring that right-leaning news outlets expound in order to get you to doubt credible, professional journalism, and to make you less informed in the service of their own biased political agenda. Does the news media have political biases? Yes, but they run both ways. Tocqueville wrote, “It was remarked by a man of genius that ‘ignorance lies at the two ends of knowledge.’ Perhaps it would have been more correct to say that strong convictions are found only at the two ends, and that doubt lies in the middle” (Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1., Ch. 11). You do yourself a disservice in ignoring any of the sources listed above out of fear of the bogeymen of liberal or conservative bias. An intelligent, informed person will be able to recognize political bias in the news and discern for themselves what makes sense in the world.

**In sum**, you gotta know the news. In politics, the cliché “knowledge is power” is often true, but equally true is that a lack of knowledge shreds your credibility among others and makes it tough to be successful.