



Buckle Up Journalists!

2024 may be a 'wild ride'

By

Mark McGee

The journalistic ‘leap’ from 2023 to 2024 may be BIGGER than we can imagine at this moment. I remember my leap from 1967 to 1968. It was my leap from being a ‘news stringer’ for a radio station in a major market to being a full-time radio journalist in a small market.

I was so excited to get started in January 1968 — having no idea what the year would bring. In addition to the ‘regular’ news a local journalist covers, my twice-hourly newscasts also covered stories like these —

- The Tet Offensive in Vietnam
- The My Lai massacre
- Russia invaded Czechoslovakia
- President Johnson announced he would not seek nor accept the presidential renomination from the Democrat party
- Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy were assassinated
- North Korea captured the USS Pueblo and tortured American crew members

- During the Summer Olympics in Mexico City, two United States black athletes silently protested racial discrimination with raised fists from the winners' stage during the National Anthem
- Police and anti-war demonstrators clashed at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.
- The issue of abortion on demand was heating up in the courts

In 1968, the country seemed to be having a nervous breakdown as battles erupted over the Vietnam War, cultural values and race. It was a hinge point in history, one of the most consequential and tumultuous years in the American experience, and it changed the country forever. [U.S. News & World Report](#)

I think **2024** has the potential to be even bigger than 1968. That's what I will share with you during the five Tuesday newsletters in January — the stories to watch carefully and cover thoughtfully and thoroughly.

Elections

You may have some hot races in the local communities you cover, so keep your eyes out for everything from mayor and city council contests to school board and county commission races. What issues seem to rise to top in their campaigns? Also watch races for district attorneys, judges, and state offices. Those include governors, lieutenant governors, state legislators, and other state-wide positions.

What are the issues? What are the campaign tactics? How are voters responding to what they see? Are the candidates addressing voter concerns? If not, what are their concerns?

I think the biggest stories in 2024 are going to be the Primary and General Elections for President and Congress. As I write this article, former President Trump seems to have the lead going into the Iowa Caucuses, but he faces several indictments and possible trials this year. Several states are trying to keep Trump off primary ballots because of the U.S. Constitution's insurrectionist ban. What do voters in your

community think about it? Election interference or election integrity?

President Biden has his own challenges this election year with falling poll numbers and Congress formalizing an official impeachment inquiry. President Biden's son also faces serious legal problems this year that could carry sizable fines and prison time if convicted. How might his situation affect his father's re-election bid?

The balance of Congress in both Houses is razor thin and many members of Congress have already announced they are not going to run again this year. Which party or parties get control of the Senate and the House of Representatives, along with who wins the Presidency, could have a big impact on the future of our country.

This is a huge year for covering elections at local, state, and national levels. Journalists, stay on top of this one. Your audience deserves your best efforts.

Wars

Wars are always big news, and we have several going on across the world that impact the U.S. in major ways. I wrote about covering the ‘local’ angle to wars in a recent newsletter, so I’ll [link to it here as a reminder](#) for you. The newsletter details some recommendations for covering protests that come from wars as well. I think we’re going to see more of those this year.

[If you are covering news ‘in’ a war zone, your employer should provide you with special training in how to do that safely and effectively.]

Another question that is harder to answer is whether future wars will continue to use ‘conventional’ weapons or if they could escalate to the use of ‘nuclear’ weapons? What do your viewers think about that? Do you have local experts in military and scientific fields who could help your audience better understand what could happen and what it might mean for them?

The 'Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists' explained the concerns about nuclear war from their perspective in an article published last week —

Globally, the world experienced renewed interests in nuclear weapons as countries looked for ways to ensure their security in the context of rising global tensions. Fearing that “Ukraine today may be Asia tomorrow,” some leaders in South Korea and Japan pressed the United States to reinforce its extended deterrence to Seoul and Tokyo. Pakistan continues to gradually expand its nuclear arsenal with more warheads, more delivery systems, and a growing fissile material production industry. And experts voiced concerns that nuclear-armed countries continue proliferating their nuclear technologies and materials in the Middle East and beyond. In the United States, a congressional commission has called for adding new nuclear capabilities to counter China’s growing nuclear arsenal—a strategy critics consider ineffective and potentially leading to a nuclear arms race.

Protests

The number of protests across the world will most likely increase in 2024, and some of them may be in your coverage area. According to the [‘Global Protest Tracker’](#) there are currently more than 400 ‘significant antigovernment protests,’ and more than 132 countries experiencing ‘significant protests.’ People are protesting about wars, anti-semitism, abortion, racial justice, government reform, police reform, court reform, systemic reform, etc. The number and intensity of those protests will most likely increase in 2024. Be ready for any that come to a ‘city near you.’

Many of the protests are occurring on college and university campuses across the country and the world. That places student journalists in the challenging position of remaining neutral in their reporting even if they have strong positions about the protests. Journalism professors can and should take a leading role in guiding student journalists in the proper way to cover and report controversial protests and other stories on campus.

Student journalism is your opportunity to ‘do’ now what you may ‘do’ for much of your adult life if you choose journalism as a career. Now is your opportunity to learn how to do it well.

One thing I learned as a journalist is not to let ‘powerful’ and ‘influential’ people intimidate me from doing the right thing in covering a story. Some of the most powerful university presidents are currently under the microscope for their positions on a variety of issues. Interviewing someone like that — the president of your college or university — can be intimidating, but this is your opportunity to learn the importance and power of the ‘press.’ You have a ‘right,’ in fact a ‘responsibility’ to your readers, listeners, and viewers to ask the ‘tough’ questions of people who are in charge of powerful and influential institutions. This is where you as a student journalist ‘learn’ the craft of *Real Journalism*. Be polite and professional as you address university presidents, deans, professors, and fellow students, but be firm knowing that the First Amendment covers your right to ask those questions. Be accurate and objective in all that you do.

Economy

Economists are all over the place on what's going to happen to the U.S. and world economies in 2024. Some predict a massive meltdown, while others predict an economic 'soft landing.' I've talked to some economists who think the U.S. will see a big recession this year. Others don't believe the government will allow that to happen and will come to the rescue 'if necessary.' They see the potential for an economic 'slowdown,' but no recession.

What do people need to live? You'll probably answer 'food, clothing, and a roof over my head.' Of course there's more to life than that, but be sure not to overlook those issues in your coverage this year. Food prices continue to climb as do clothing and other 'essentials.' Talk with people in your community to find out how they're coping and what strategies they're using to 'stretch' their dollars.

Also, keep your eyes on housing costs. That includes purchases and rentals. The share of income needed to cover monthly mortgage costs jumped from 22.17% in November 2019 to 38.6% in November 2023. The share of ‘median household income needed to cover rent costs increased from 26.7% in November 2019 to 29.9% in November 2023.’

The increases in housing costs are especially being felt by younger Millennials and Generation Zers.’ Many are having to live with their parents, while other are looking to their parents for financial assistance to pay their bills.

You may remember this report from last summer —

Recent data shows Americans between the ages 25 to 34 are living with their parents at rates not seen since 1972 ... Over half of Gen Zers and millennials (54%) consider themselves at least somewhat financially dependent on their parents with 23% stating they’re still very dependent on their parents, according to newly released research Experian®. While Gen Z had a higher percentage of financial dependency on their

parents (61%), nearly half (47%) of millennials still consider themselves somewhat or very financially dependent on their parents. [Business Insider](#)

You might consider a series of reports about the struggles of young Millennials and Gen Zers, followed by a ‘townhall’ or ‘editorial board’ style meeting with young people, parents, and financial experts to discuss what the future holds.

Something else to watch for this year is what happens to **Fed Now**. It may be a rough year for the new program [that began last summer](#) —

The Fed’s new instant-payments system FedNow can be a game changer, giving people and businesses immediate access to their money and slashing fees that make it expensive to be poor in America.

But for FedNow to work, banks must use it. Unfortunately, right now they aren’t. Less than 1% of banks and credit unions have signed up, and many of these charge a lot for the service. [MarketWatch](#)

Another economic issue to watch carefully this month and next are two government ‘shutdown’ deadlines —

Congress passed stopgap legislation in mid-November extending government funding until January 19 for priorities including military construction, veterans’ affairs, transportation, housing and the Energy Department. The rest of the government will be funded until February 2. [CNN Politics](#)

Both deadlines are just weeks away, though Congress may be close to a deal based on [news from this past weekend](#). What happens in Congress in the coming days may impact people in your audience directly. Don’t just think about people you know, think about your entire audience. That means city-dwellers, rural-dwellers, young and old, rich and poor. Everybody. They need to know what you know. They need to know the truth. That’s the job of ‘real journalism.’

[If you cover economic news in countries outside the United States, your situation may be different. Find out what financial news is big in your country and follow it carefully for your audience.]

Jobs

Watch companies in your community to see how they handle the economic news. Will they cut back on hiring, salaries, and benefits? Will they increase layoffs? With so many Americans living from paycheck to paycheck, many people are concerned what may happen to them and others in 2024.

Here's one example —

Nike, a bellwether for the global economy, sounded a warning sign Thursday as the sneaker giant sees consumers becoming more cautious.

Nike slashed its revenue outlook for the year and announced cost cuts amid growing concerns that consumers are slowing their spending around the world. The company said it's looking for as much as \$2 billion in cost savings in the next

three years, which includes laying off employees. [CNN](#)

Many reports show that more Americans are getting second jobs or ‘side hustles’ because of inflation or concerns about inflation —

Around 8.4 million people had more than one job in October, which is more than 5% of the workforce.

Job analysts cite multiple reasons including the rise in remote work, holiday expenses, inflation, or preparation for tough times or layoffs. [WFTV-TV](#)

Keep your eyes on job numbers, hiring, layoffs, and anything else ‘job related’ in 2024. Tell stories through the lives of real people. Talk with employers, employees, and people working multiple jobs or dealing with layoffs.

Other job concerns for 2024 include —

- Return to office, work remotely, or combination of both?
- Flexible work schedules?
- Work week: 4-day or 5-day?
- Compensation: increases, decreases, or remain the same?
- Benefits: insurance, vacations, medical leave?
- Job security: stay at same job longer or move to new jobs for new opportunities?
- Staff retention: the challenge for employers to keep experienced and talented people
- Return of retirees to the workforce because of inflation and other financial concerns
- Impact of Gen Z on employment as the workforce becomes younger

- Impact of Artificial Intelligence on workers — those with Generative AI skills may have an advantage over those who don't
- The impact of other technological advances on workers in 2024 and beyond
- 'Upskilling and reskilling' some of the workforce to meet the demands of technological changes at work
- Strikes and other forms of work stoppage for workers to gain more control of their workplaces — how employers, unions, and governments will respond
- Increase of minimum wage in some states already leading to layoffs .. more may be coming this year

Taxes

Taxes are always a hot topic - local, state, and national.

Will taxes go up? Stay the same? Go down? Which taxes? How will people handle increases or decreases in taxes? What are their concerns? How are they planning to deal with their personal budget if taxes increase? Tell your stories through the eyes of real people, not just officials.

Also think about doing a story about how much people pay in many different types of taxes —

- Local sales taxes
- State sales taxes
- Food tax (in some states)
- Prescription tax (only in Illinois)
- Excise taxes (including fuel, tobacco, and airline tickets)

- State income tax
- Federal income tax
- Small business taxes
- Value-added taxes
- Property taxes
- Payroll taxes (including FICA)
- Capital gains taxes
- Inheritance/estate taxes
- Travel taxes

When Americans add up all the taxes they pay in a year, they may be very surprised to see how much of their hard-earned money goes to pay local, state, and federal government agencies. Ask them what they think about all those taxes. Are any tax increases on election ballots this year? Talk with tax and financial experts about legal ways people can cut their tax burden. Some

of your audience may also view government tolls and fees as types of taxes as well.

Reparations

Several governors and state legislators are calling for major reparations for descendants of slaves (e.g. New York, California, Tennessee). Other states are opposed to reparations for a variety of reasons. Many question why now and how the states will come up with enough money to pay millions of dollars for reparations to some of its citizens.

A majority of Californians do not support reparations, according to a September poll. Almost 60% of California voters opposed cash payments, while 29% of voters supported the idea, according to a UC Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies poll that was cosponsored by the Los Angeles Times.

Here's what one Tennessee state representative is planning to do about reparations in 2024 —

"Tennessee is the birthplace of the Ku Klux Klan, yet my colleagues told me it was 'too controversial' to bring up legislation about reparations," Jones wrote on X on Friday.

"Nonetheless, looking forward to filing a reparations bill in 2024. It is long overdue," he added. [Tag24](#)

Some members of Congress have said that \$14-trillion will 'eliminate the racial wealth gap' in the United States. ([ABC News](#)) That raises many questions about who will pay for the reparations, who will qualify to receive them, how payments will be made, etc.

What's happening in your community and state? Talk with your audience. What do they think about state-by-state reparations? What do they think about national reparations? Talk with all ethnic groups. Interview the decision makers in these cases. Where do candidates stand on the issue this election season? The issue of reparations will most likely be on some ballots, so this is a good time to cover the story.

"A plurality of Americans," Tatishe Nteta says, "don't believe the descendants of slaves deserve reparations."

The political science professor at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, plans more research to get at exactly why people think that. The other most common reasons opponents cite is that it's "impossible to place a monetary value on the impact of slavery" and "African Americans are treated equally in society today."

Nteta, and also the Pew Research Center, find about three-quarters or more of white adults oppose reparations, and so do a majority of Latinos and Asian Americans. A large majority of Black Americans support them. There's also more support among younger people and a sharp political divide, with overwhelming opposition from Republicans and conservatives. [NPR](#)

Gun Laws

Many people are calling for stricter gun laws in states across the country, while others say the proposed restrictions are unconstitutional. Many new gun laws in various states went into effect on January 1st, including more strict 'carry' laws, weapon-type restrictions, new registration and taxation laws (including ammunition), etc.

Some of the new gun restrictions are being challenged in court. Here are a couple of examples —

The 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has granted Maryland's petition for the full court to consider the state's handgun licensing law that was struck down in November by a three-judge panel, Maryland Attorney General Anthony Brown said Thursday. CBS News

Advocates for gun rights urged the New Mexico Supreme Court on Monday to block emergency orders by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham restricting people from carrying guns at public parks and playgrounds in the

state's largest metro area and address gun violence as a public health crisis. The Associated Press

What's going on in your community and state? How will new gun restrictions impact your audience? How will new laws affect hunters? What do law enforcement agencies think about the new laws? What does your audience think about the court challenges to the new laws? Be sure to get all sides of the stories you cover and tell your stories through real people and not just 'officials.'

Crime

Is crime up or down in the United States? To be more specific, what types of crimes are up and what types of crime are down?

After three years of distressingly high levels, homicides in the US declined significantly across the board in 2023 – even as the public’s concerns about crime remained at its highest in over two decades.

In particular, the five biggest cities in the US – New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston and Phoenix – each saw homicides fall by over 10%, according to the latest data from those police departments.

Further, national data from the FBI covering January to September 2023 showed an 8.2% drop in all violent crime, including a 15.6% drop in murders, compared to the same period in 2022. These declines were seen in cities over 1 million people and those under 10,000, and across all four regional quadrants of the US. The

full year of data won't be released until this fall, but the trend is clear.

Taken together, the broad decline in crimes in 2023 suggests societal disruptions from the Covid-19 pandemic and the 2020 police murder of George Floyd have faded, policing experts say. [CNN](#)

While some violent crimes are on the decrease, what about non-violent crimes? Many communities are reporting an increase in [car theft](#) and retail threat —

Finance executives say they are fighting a growing wave of theft, cutting into profits that were already under pressure. But theft is just one contributor to shrink, the industry term for the difference between inventory on the books and what's physically on hand. Lost or damaged goods and inaccurate records also play a part. The picture of retail shrink, which retailers say has been accelerating, may also have been distorted by effects of the pandemic and inflation, some analysts say. [The Wall Street Journal](#)

Interestingly enough, city leaders in our nation's capital are looking at ways to stem the tide of growing crime. Scores of restaurants have closed in Washington D.C. because of crime —

According to the Metropolitan Washington Restaurant Association, 52 restaurants in D.C. have shuttered in 2023. [Fox News](#)

In addition to car theft being up 84%, other crime in D.C. increased almost 40%. That has led city leaders to look at how to deal with the growing crime problem in the nation's capital —

Public safety legislation unveiled Wednesday by local lawmakers in the nation's capital is aimed at bringing down spiraling violent crimes rates that have stoked public anxiety and prompted congressional scrutiny.

Homicides jumped by 35 percent in 2023 in Washington while car thefts and carjackings both essentially doubled. The carjacking victims in D.C. last year included a U.S. Congressman and a diplomat

from the United Arab Emirates. Deputy Mayor for Public Safety Lyndsey Appiah openly admitted before a congressional hearing last year that the District is in the midst of a crime crisis.

The proposed bill loosens restrictions for police officers on physically handling suspects and when they are authorized to engage in vehicular pursuits. It would also allow police officer to review their own body camera footage prior to making their report in cases not involving serious use of force. [PBS News Hour](#)

Is crime up or down in your coverage area? Are the types of crimes changing? More felonies? Less felonies? Murder rates up or down? Shootings up or down? How about car thefts and carjackings? What about assaults? Identity theft? Rape? Child trafficking? Scams against the elderly?

Person-to-person crimes, along with cyber crimes — what's happening in your community? What does your audience think about the enforcement of current laws and recommendations for new laws? What do your local

enforcement agencies and government leaders think about crime trends in your coverage area?

Look for ways to tell crime stories through the lives of real people. Crimes are not just statistics. Behind every crime statistic are real people suffering and struggling as they seek justice. Don't just cover family and attorney news conferences. Go to where people live. If they are open to telling their story from inside their homes and businesses, do that. Crime is personal, so tell it as 'personally' as you can.

Criminal Justice

What does your audience think about the way local district attorneys and judges are handling crime in your community? What charges are district attorneys making, and what charges are they dropping? How are judges ruling on crimes brought before them in court? Most were tough on convicted criminals when I covered courts years ago. Is that still the case? If not, why not? Talk with judges and district attorneys to get their take on what's happening.

Compare local crime numbers with state and national numbers. Are things better or worse where you live? If worse, what do prosecutors and judges plan to do about it? Are bail laws tough enough? Are sentences effective? Ask tough questions of these powerful people. Remember, they are elected or appointed for the purpose of 'serving' the public. Is the public being served? Is the public protected? Part of your job as a journalist is to hold powerful people accountable for how they carry out their responsibilities for the good of the community.

Immigration ‘Crisis’

Many states are taking the immigration ‘crisis’ (their words) into their own hands. Republican Governor Greg Abbot of Texas recently signed a bill into law that would make unauthorized border crossings a state crime. It could take effect this March. I say ‘could’ because the Department of Justice says it may file a lawsuit against Texas to stop them

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The Justice Department said it would file a lawsuit against SB4 if Texas did not assure federal officials by Jan. 3 that the state would refrain from enforcing the law as planned in March, according to a letter sent to Gov. Greg Abbott on Dec. 28 and obtained by CBS News. In addition to creating illegal entry crimes at the state level, the law would allow Texas judges to issue de facto deportation orders. [CBS News](#)

Other governors and legislators, Republican and Democrat, are complaining that the [hundreds of thousands of immigrants](#) coming into the U.S. from the southern border are overwhelming their ability to meet migrant needs, while still trying to meet the needs of American citizens who have lived in their states for years.

Some mayors near the southern border have made emergency declarations to try to deal with the challenges of illegal drugs and human trafficking they face. If you are a journalist covering a border community, what kind of stories are you doing? Are you telling the story through the lives of real people or just officials? How is the immigrant situation affecting business and home owners in your coverage area?

Some Republican border state governors have bussed or flown immigrants to northern Democrat-controlled 'sanctuary' cities which has led to many lawsuits filed to stop the practice. Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson is an example of one Democrat mayor who is suing bus companies that are delivering immigrants to Chicago. New York Mayor Eric Adams has called the immigration problem in his city a 'crisis.' These and other mayors are asking for more federal help to

deal with the ‘surge’ of asylum seekers arriving in their cities

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The mayors of New York, Chicago and Denver on Wednesday renewed their calls for federal assistance to address the surge in asylum seekers entering their cities on buses and flights chartered by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott amid the Republican's feud over immigration with the Biden administration. [UPI News](#)

Is anything like that happening where you live? What does your audience think about it? What can city leaders do about it?

Many American workers are complaining that the current administration’s plan to give Temporary Protected Status to hundreds of thousands of immigrants will make it even more difficult for American citizens to find jobs. Is that happening in your area? If so, what kind of stories can you tell this year to help everyone understand the personal and community impact? Some even believe that the current administration has made the choice [‘not’ to enforce](#) immigration laws already on the books.

What's it like to be an immigrant who crossed the southern border? Tell their story so viewers better understand why they left their country to come to the U.S. What do they hope to accomplish by living in America? How have Americans treated them? Who is helping them and who's not?

What's it like to be an American citizen and watch as immigrants cross the southern border and receive benefits that a citizen is not entitled to receive. Fair? Unfair? How are citizens dealing with millions of immigrants pouring through the southern border and being bussed or flown to cities across the country? How are citizens dealing with billions of tax dollars being spent on immigrants crossing the southern border?

What about immigrants who went through the long process of becoming 'legal' immigrants? Do they think what's happening on the southern border is fair to them and others like them? What do they suggest in answer to the challenge?

Another concern that many citizens are raising is the fear that terrorists are sneaking into the country through the southern border. Some ranchers in Arizona and other states are pointing to cartel members, possible terrorists, and fighting-aged young men from scores of other nations who are successfully crossing the border.

Some analysts believe the best solution to the immigration crises is to ‘increase’ legal immigration —

Increasing legal immigration and creating more legal pathways for peaceful, hard-working migrants to come to America is the only way to solve the border crisis for good. One strategy for doing that is to allow for more employer sponsorship, getting rid of caps on work visas and letting the market dictate how many migrant workers it can take. [Newsweek](#)

Be fair and impartial in your reporting. Be truthful and thorough. A journalist’s job is to tell the ‘whole’ story, not just the part with which they agree. Immigration is one of the biggest stories of recent years and will continue to be in 2024. Stay on top of it and how it affects your community.

Citizen Migration

Tens of thousands of American citizens are on the move. They are leaving what they refer to as ‘liberal’ or ‘socialist’ states and moving to what they hope will be better places to raise their families. Some people move to nearby states (e.g. Nevada, Idaho, Arizona); others move across the country (e.g. Texas, Florida, Tennessee).

Is that happening in your community? Are people leaving your state? If so, find some to interview before they leave. What was their main reason for moving? Are they moving to your state? If so, why? What was their main reason for moving? How have their decisions affected your local community?

We’ve been reading or watching stories about this ‘citizen migration’ for at least the past two or three years. I’ve seen or read many stories about local reaction from people who hope the migration doesn’t end up changing the communities where they live. Here’s a recent example —

Retired California public employees are flocking to Idaho with their pension funds and becoming the financial "lifeblood" of at least one Idaho town, ruffling feathers with some locals who are taking issue with the "liberal baggage" of the new residents.

The Los Angeles Times reported this month the town of Eagle, Idaho, has seen an influx of retired cops and firefighters moving to their town with many of them identifying as conservative but who "seem practically socialist to the old guard" with their large pensions. [Fox News](#)

Journalists, keep your eye on this story in 2024. Many people have expressed concerns about how 'citizen migration' could affect elections, in addition to changing the landscape of smaller communities.

Health

The last few years have been tough on the health of Americans. Many people lack trust in the 'health' community, which means they lack trust in doctors, pharmaceutical companies, and others in the medical community. That has led to a 'physician shortage' even as the medical needs of an aging population increase.

The American Medical Association's president, Dr. Jesse M. Ehrenfeld recently called the physician shortage a "public health crisis."

"It's an urgent crisis, hitting every corner of this country – urban and rural," Ehrenfeld told reporters at a press conference in October, "with the most direct impact hitting families with high needs and limited means." NPR

Is this a problem in your coverage area? If so, how is it affecting community health? Talk with doctors, hospitals, and real people to find out. If some of your coverage area includes rural areas, how are physician shortages and hospital closures affecting the health of people living in those areas?

This report is about six-months old, but still makes a current point. Rural hospitals and the people who depend on them are facing tough times —

There are 646 rural hospitals at risk of closure due to financial issues, comprising around 30 percent of all rural hospitals in the U.S., according to the Center for Healthcare Quality & Payment Reform.

The hospitals face losses on patient services as health plans aren't paying enough to cover the cost of care delivery. The losses will likely increase as inflation and workforce shortages persist, according to the report, which was released in April. While rural hospitals are receiving some support through grants, local tax revenues or other profits, they still have low financial reserves and remain at risk.

More than half the states in the U.S. report 25 percent or more of their rural hospitals are at risk of closure, and more than 200 hospitals nationwide are at immediate risk of closing. [Becker's Hospital CFO Report](#)

Click on the ‘Becker’s’ link above to see what’s happening in your state. Also, check into the number of medical doctors, clinics, and specialists who are leaving rural areas for better-paying positions in cities. What about doctors, nurses, and other health professionals retiring? What does 2024 look like for rural areas in your coverage area? Be sure to tell your stories through the lives of real people. That is ‘that important’ part of ‘Real Journalism.’

What about health insurance? Many companies are charging their employees more and providing less medical care to cut costs. How is that affecting people in your community? What about increases in Medicare and cuts to Medicaid? How are those affecting your audience?

What about prescription costs? Increases in medical care costs? Are people in your audience cutting other expenses or cutting health care? Talk with real people and find out.

Another health concern in the United States is how to provide healthcare for the hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants coming into the country each month. Some state are doing it with tax-payer dollars —

A growing number of states are opening taxpayer-funded health insurance programs to immigrants, including those living in the U.S. without authorization, even as Republicans assail President Joe Biden over a dramatic increase in illegal crossings of the southern border.

Eleven states and Washington, D.C., together provide full health insurance coverage to more than 1 million low-income immigrants regardless of their legal status, according to state data compiled by KFF Health News. Most aren't authorized to live in the U.S., state officials say.

Enrollment in these programs could nearly double by 2025 as at least seven states initiate or expand coverage. In January, Republican-controlled Utah will start covering children regardless of immigration status, while New York and California will widen eligibility to cover more adults. [NPR](#)

What's happening in your state? Your coverage area? What does your audience think about this tax-payer provision? What about the medical community? Can doctors and hospitals handle the increase in patients and costs? How long will taxpayer dollars be available to pay for immigrant healthcare before money runs out for American citizens?

Also, keep your eyes on a report expected this May by the *World Health Organization* (WHO) that could have a major impact on the future of pandemic and other health-related responses —

Member States of the World Health Organization (WHO) continued their discussions towards a global accord on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, with a view to presenting the outcome of their work to the World Health Assembly in May 2024. [World Health Organization](#)

The head of the WHO says the world needs to properly prepare for future pandemics after finally ending three years of Covid "crisis, pain and loss,"

In his end-of-year message, World Health Organization director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said 2023 had marked a turning point in fighting major health challenges but had also brought "immense and avoidable suffering."

As he closed out the WHO's 75th year, Ghebreyesus said that in terms of emergency preparedness and response, gaps remain in the world's readiness to prevent the next pandemic.

"But 2024 offers a unique opportunity to address these gaps," he said, with countries negotiating the first-ever global agreement on pandemic threats.

"The pandemic accord is being designed to bridge the gaps in global collaboration, cooperation and equity," said Ghebreyesus. [Independent Online](#) (IOL)

How might the new 'global accord' affect the health organizations in your coverage area? Talk with doctors, hospital administrators, medical clinic operators, pharmacists, and patients to share their thoughts and tell their stories.

Education

Education is big news in local communities, states, and the federal government. What are the biggest concerns in your community or state? What about K-12? Colleges? Universities? Student loan payoffs? How about the issue of public vs. private education? School vouchers? Homeschooling? School security? Biological males competing against biological females in traditionally 'female' athletics? Biological boys and girls sharing same bathrooms, showers, changing rooms, dorm rooms, etc?

Another story that is similar to the **Health** category above is the cost of educating undocumented immigrants in your state and local community. Here's a report from last summer —

The U.S. Departments of Justice and Education are putting public schools on notice that immigrant children and youth are entitled to a free public education, regardless of their immigration status.

The two agencies published fact sheets earlier this month reminding families and educators of the rights immigrant students—specifically migratory children and unaccompanied minors—have when it comes to receiving a public education.

It's a reminder advocates and researchers say is needed as more immigrant students are expected to enroll in the coming years, and as they continue to face challenges in accessing quality education. [Education Week](#)

What does your audience think about providing public education to undocumented immigrants at tax-payer expense? What about the education community? Can educators and school systems handle the increase in students and costs?

Another issue is undocumented immigrant students getting federal financial aid for college, including Pell grants or student loans. Allowing immigrant students to pay in-state tuition costs is another tax-payer issue in [some states](#).

Here's another 'education' issue you may want to cover. ProPublica had an interesting article earlier this month about a challenge in public education that many people may not have considered -

Skipping School: America's Hidden Education Crisis

Absenteeism has nearly doubled since the pandemic. With state and federal governments largely abdicating any role in getting kids back into classrooms, some schools have turned to private companies for a reimagined version of the truant officer. [ProPublica](#)

What's happening in your coverage area? Is 'skipping school' a big problem in your local school systems? Are public schools hiring private companies to get kids back in class? If so, at what cost and who is paying for it?

2024 will certainly have many education stories for you to cover. Be sure to talk to all sides of these issues and tell as many of your stories through real people as you can.

Religion

Religion is another big story in local communities. Some religious groups are growing, while others are losing members. Pastors and other leaders are leaving the ‘ministry’ at increasing numbers. Thousands of churches are closing across the U.S. and the world every year. More people are becoming ‘Nones,’ meaning they have no religious affiliation.

Since the 1990s, large numbers of Americans have left Christianity to join the growing ranks of U.S. adults who describe their religious identity as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular.” This accelerating trend is reshaping the U.S. religious landscape, leading many people to wonder what the future of religion in America might look like. [Pew Research](#)

Many religious groups are seeing splits in relationships because of issues like blessing same-sex marriages, anti-semitism, and social-justice issues. What's happening in your coverage area? Talk with pastors, priests, and the 'people in the pews.' How are these stories impacting their lives? What challenges do they see for 2024 and beyond?

Another big issue in multiple countries across the world is 'religious persecution.' Tens of millions of Christians are being persecuted for their beliefs in countries like China, North Korea, Iran, Sudan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. The number of countries that are either 'hostile' to Christians or 'restrict' Christians from practicing their faith is growing.

Jews are also facing persecution on a scale across the world not seen for many years. Much of that persecution comes from the war between Israel and Hamas, but anti-semitism was growing long before the war began in October of last year. Other religions also face persecution, especially in countries where they are a small minority.

Consider doing some special coverage of religion in your community. Profile families with different religious worldviews. Talk with religious leaders about where they see their religion going in your area in the future. A religious ‘town hall’ might also be a good way for people of various religions to share their views with your viewers, listeners, or readers.

Pro-Choice/Pro-Life

Pro-Choice/Pro-Life is another big story to watch this year, especially since the Supreme Court decision concerning *Roe v. Wade*. Many people believe it will become a [hot issue again in 2024](#), especially with [elections in the offing](#). Where do the presidential candidates stand on the issue? Here's a recent story from [ABC News](#).

The annual [March for Life Rally](#) in Washington D.C. was held on January 19th. Did people from your community attend? If so, do a story with them about what they saw and heard, and what they think about the importance of this issue in the 2024 elections. Also talk with people who attended any counter rallies across the country (Pro-Choice). What's happening in your community? Get all sides of the story, stay neutral, and tell your stories through the lives of real people.

LGBTQ+

LGBTQ+ will continue to make headlines this year in light of elections — local, state, and federal. One Republican state governor [has already vetoed a bill](#) that would have ‘prohibited gender-affirming care for trans and nonbinary youth’ The governor said, ‘Ultimately, I believe this is about protecting human life.’

Where do the [presidential](#), gubernatorial, and congressional candidates stand on this and other LGBTQ+ issues?

What about the LGBTQ+ community plans for 2024? They have a theme this year titled ‘Creating Change’ —

Through Creating Change and other advocacy programs, the National LGBTQ Task Force is training and mobilizing thousands of activists across the nation to deliver a world where you can be you. [The Task Force](#)

The 'Through Creating Change Conference' was held January 17-21. Did anyone from your community attend? If so, do a story with them about what they saw and heard, and any plans the local LGBTQ+ community has planned for your coverage area in 2024.

Get all sides of the story, stay neutral, and tell your stories through the lives of real people.

Artificial Intelligence and Other Technology

Artificial Intelligence (AI) will continue to be big news as we have entered into a new year. As we've written in the past, the expansion of AI is exponential and will become more involved in the lives of people across the world this year and in the years to come.

In addition to OpenAI, Microsoft, Google, Amazon, and Meta, many experts believe 2024 could see even more AI startups -

"In 2024, I expect the momentum we saw from this past year only to increase," Samuel Mangold-Lenett, staff editor at The Federalist, told Fox News Digital. "Corporations have found solid footing, startups are learning how to customize it to fill various niches, and the public has realized that in some critical ways AI technology is a net positive."

Mangold-Lenett also believes 2024 will be the year that, like other technologies, AI will become much more customizable to individual users. [Fox News](#)

The World Economic Forum (WEF) is also warning that AI could be involved in massive ‘disinformation’ that could lead to the potential of a ‘global catastrophe’ —

Humanity faces a perilous future, marked by an explosion of disinformation turbocharged by artificial intelligence and the devastating effects of climate change.

The gloomy outlook comes from an annual survey by the World Economic Forum (WEF) of people paid to identify and manage global risks.

According to the report published Wednesday, nearly two-thirds of respondents expect an “elevated chance of global catastrophes” in the next decade. About 30% expect the same in the next two years. [CNN](#)

Many technology experts are thrilled with the growth of AI. However, others are deeply concerned about what could happen in the coming years. While many call 2023 a [‘landmark year’ for AI innovations](#), 2024 may be even bigger. I’ll be writing about the ‘Good and Bad of AI’ throughout the year as warranted. I suggest you keep your eyes on this story as well — not just the innovations, but how AI will affect your audience.

2024 may also see [other technological concerns](#) — including privacy issues and community disconnection. Another example is called ‘Resurrection Biology.’ That’s where scientists are attempting to bring molecule strings and even more complex organisms back to life. Some in the scientific community are concerned about stirring what they call [‘zombie viruses’](#) that have been dormant for thousands of years.

What about AI's future in space?

Billionaire Elon Musk took to social media to express his agreement with a fellow tech leader's prediction that there will be about 1 billion humanoid robots on Earth in two decades.

Musk took to X, formerly Twitter, to concur with the prediction made by David Holz, the founder of artificial intelligence (AI) research lab Midjourney. Holz said in a post last week that "we should be expecting a billion humanoid robots on earth in the 2040s and a hundred billion (mostly alien) robots throughout the solar system in the 2060s."

Musk replied, "Probably something like that, provided the foundations of civilization are stable."

Tesla, one of the companies Musk founded, has developed a prototype humanoid robot that the billionaire may view as contributing to humanity reaching that lofty prediction two decades from now. [Fox News](#)

Keep your eyes open, journalists. AI may be a 'wild ride.'

Climate Change

Many climate experts predict 2024 will be the hottest year on record —

The Met Office outlook for global temperature suggests 2024 will be a further record-breaking year, expected to exceed 2023, which is itself almost certain to be the warmest year on record. [Met Office UK](#)

The Met Office also says the shift to an ‘El Niño’ climate pattern could lead the world to ‘breach 1.5°C of warming’ for the first time in 2024.

Some climate experts even believe the world is in the middle of a ‘mass extinction’ —

... caused not by a city-size space rock but by the overgrowth and transformative behavior of a single species— Homo sapiens. Humans have destroyed habitats and unleashed a climate crisis.

Calculations in a September study published in the journal PNAS have suggested that groups of related animal species are disappearing at a rate 35% times higher than the normally expected rate. [CNN](#)

Is this true? Is the world on the brink of extinction? Many groups are calling on President Biden to declare a 'climate emergency.' Some current and former [presidential candidates](#) are skeptical that there is a 'real climate emergency'. Some people even believe a climate emergency is a 'hoax.' Which is it? Truth, hoax, or somewhere between? If it's true, why do some deny it? Why do [many scientists](#) claim there is **no** 'climate emergency' when many other scientists say there **is** a 'climate emergency?' How can people know who to believe?

Talk with experts from all perspectives. Journalists should be searching for 'scientific evidence' for the issue of a climate 'emergency' and the potential for world-wide climate calamities. Also, talk with people in your community to find out what they think about the issue? Are they concerned? If they are, what are they doing about it? If not, why not? Do they think 'climate' will be a hot issue this election year?

These are just ‘some’ of the big stories you will cover as a journalist in 2024. If you cover local news, you’ll be attending government meetings, news conferences, crimes, fires, accidents, and weather-related stories. That’s a big part of what local journalists do. However, don’t forget how national and world stories affect your audience. Look for ways to bring ‘local angles’ to those stories as well.



1960s Radio News, © Mark McGee