

## 26th ISOJ Keynote Session: A Conversation with Terry Tang, Executive Editor, Los Angeles Times

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  - Chair: Evan Smith, co-founder, The Texas Tribune, and senior advisor, Emerson Collective
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**Summer Harlow** Next up, we're going to have our last keynote session, actually. It's a conversation with Terry Tang, executive editor of the Los Angeles Times. And Evan Smith, the senior advisor from the Emerson Collective and the co-founder of the Texas Tribune, is also going to be moderating this session. And we just want to say how appreciative and grateful we are to Evan for all of the amazing support he's given to ISOJ over the years. He has been a long time supporter, not just of ISOJ in terms of coming, but also of helping us organize wonderful panels and helping moderate these panels. He does such a wonderful job and all of his panels are always a big hit. So we are ever grateful to him. So welcome Evan and Terry to the stage.

**Evan Smith** I am indeed, again, Evan Smith, senior advisor at Emerson Collective, co-founder and former CEO of the Texas Tribune. I have the privilege of leading ISOJ's final keynote session this year. It's a conversation with Terry Tang, the executive editor of the Los Angeles Times. Terry oversees the paper's newsroom and its opinion section at a tumultuous time in its 142-year history and at an anxiety-riddled moment for American media. She was appointed to that post in 2024, becoming the paper's first-ever female editor after serving for two years as its editorial page editor. She joined the Times in July 2019, as a deputy op-ed editor following a brief detour as director of publications and editorial at the ACLU. Before that, she spent 20 years at the New York Times in a variety of roles, deputy editorial page, op-ed editor, assistant editorial page editor, editorial writer, deputy technology editor, metro desk major beats editor, and co-founder and editor of Room for Debate, an online platform for rapid response commentary. She spent the early years of her career in Seattle as an editorial writer and columnist at the Seattle Times and as a reporter at the Seattle Weekly. Point of personal privilege, Terry was last in Austin in July 2024, and it was then that I asked her to appear at this conference, and she quickly said yes. It was, shall we say, a less complicated moment for her employer. Between then and now, I gently reached out and said, are you sure you still want to come? To her credit, she never wavered. Respect. We're happy and lucky that she's here. Please welcome Terry Tang. Good to be with you.

**Terry Tang** Thank you, Evan, it's great to be here. Thank you everyone for joining us in this conversation. I also want to take a point of personal privilege. I want to thank the journalists who appeared with Ann Marie Lipinski at this morning's session. I was so moved, and it was a great privilege to hear them. And I just want to give my personal thank you to Carlos Dada, Gülsin Harman, Arfa Khanum, and András Pethő. I'm sorry if I mispronounced. It was so important for me to hear that, and that it was a real act of courage to appear on this very stage. And as an American journalist, I'm not sure that I could even understand that level of courage and bravery and commitment. And that is one of the most important things I'm going to take back to the Los Angeles Times newsroom, and I will share that with our staff.

**Evan Smith** Heroic. Terry, as you know, my intention was to come out here and generically ask you what's going on at the paper and have a conversation about that, give

you a chance after a challenging stretch of time at the Times, a challenging stretch of time in the media business, to tell us to stay of play. Then I read Oliver Darcy's newsletter last night, and he led with you guys. I've got to ask you about that first. So this is a quote from Oliver Darcy's newsletter. "On Wednesday, word began to ripple through the Los Angeles Times newsroom that another round of cost cutting was underway, adding to the turbulence the newspaper has endured over the last year. The latest round of layoffs, according to multiple people familiar with the situation, targeted employees on the business side of the operation, those in departments such as operations and communications. The losses were substantial. I'm told the dozens of staffers were let go this week as Patrick Soon-Shiong, the owner of the paper, and his team move aggressively to reduce overhead with additional layoffs anticipated in the weeks ahead." Is that true or not?

**Terry Tang** Well, there have been staff reductions.

**Evan Smith** Over the last couple of days

**Terry Tang** Yeah. So, yeah, on the business side. I mean, it's a very difficult time. There is no way to sugarcoat it. You know, our owner, Patrick Soon-Shiong, continues to support and finance the paper, you know, to a huge deficit. And that has meant the world to me as a journalist. And I think it means a tremendous amount to the communities in Los Angeles, and that remains to be.

**Evan Smith** He doesn't have to do this, is the point. He does not have to continue to sustain those losses.

**Terry Tang** He does not. I mean, you know, it's a choice, right? And we have gotten to a point where the financial aspects of this business, especially for big metro newspapers, is extremely challenging. We remain the largest newsroom west of the Potomac. We cover every part of life. We cover a county that's got eight million people, which is the size of New Jersey. We cover every part of it. We cover and provide sports, food, entertainment, outdoors, recreation. We continue to cover every part of California, its water quality. And then of course with the fires, which you all may have followed, that was an entire, whole, every person in the newsroom was involved with that. Because we were part of that community. Everybody who lives in LA is affected by it and no one more than our journalists. So just keeping that kind of coverage is expensive, and that our secular change, which has been a long time coming, many different phases of change, financial change in this industry has affected every newsroom and it continues to affect the LA Times.

**Evan Smith** Right. Well, so Oliver Darcy, to the point of how it affects the LA Times, one more quote from this because it gets to the specifics of the mood in the newsroom, which of course you have responsibility for. "Inside the news room," Oliver writes, "Where anxiety over job security has been simmering for months, the developments of this week have only deepened a sense of dread," he says. "There's a growing concern that the newspaper is being hollowed out." I'm aware of two pretty big rounds of layoffs previous to these that affected the newsroom. There have been buyouts as well. Can you say for certainty that the newsroom is safe from future cuts? Can you say that?

**Terry Tang** No, of course I can't say that. I mean, no organization can say that there are not going to be future changes. Right. That would just be, you know, untrue.

**Evan Smith** I mean, I understand that, of course. What is the message, though, to the journalists who are doing what you described correctly as this heroic work under very difficult circumstances? What is the message to them as they think about the anxiety of being in this business at this moment, at this place, against this backdrop?

**Terry Tang** There's no way to not be anxious about the work we do. The only way to do that, is the only way to calm your mind and to feel that this is a profession worth pursuing is to go back to the mission. And the best thing, I was having a difficult conversation with an editor a few weeks ago. And this editor said, "Well, I've got to feel better about this. I'm going to go edit some stories." And this was 9:30 at night. And that's really where that joy and mission comes from. And you know, how far we go as the LA Times serving our community. And our community is vast. It's so many types of communities all in one. We have, we are serving so many different, you know, ethnic communities, immigrant communities, long-standing old communities, brand new people who came to LA for something. We have a responsibility for all of that. And unless you find joy in that, and purpose, and dignity, and you still consider being a journalist an incredible privilege, then it's going to be very hard. I mean, it just is hard. It's stressful.

**Evan Smith** And it's not specific, I mean, in fairness to the Times, it is not only the Times going through a version of this. Right?

**Terry Tang** No, everybody is going through a version of this. I mean, NPR, LAist, which is at KCRW, who are the public radio stations in LA. I love them. They are pivotal. They are foundational to the news ecosystem in Los Angeles. They're having a hard time. There isn't any news gathering organization that does it professionally that isn't having a hard time. You know, because we are professionals. I mean, so we have standards. We've trained to do this. Many of us have spent decades perfecting the craft. If you look at the front page of the LA Times, of which I am extremely proud every day, is that it is done, that no one can do that. You can't just walk in and do what we do because it's professional. And the other thing I want to point out, which is that we're the only industry where everything we create is unique every day. And nobody does that, no other industry does that. There are no shortcuts, really. If you want to have a great story of what is happening in City Hall, somebody has to have those sources. Somebody has to write it up. Somebody has to confirm it. Somebody has to design it. And that is, Apple doesn't do that. You have like iPhone 16s. All those iPhone 16s come out. You've got a prototype. We do this every single day, multiple times a day.

**Evan Smith** It's bespoke.

**Terry Tang** Yeah, it's completely handmade. What industry does that every single day? And so as everybody is confined and constrained by resources, we continue to live by that. So every single day the news is new, it's fresh, it is urgent.

**Evan Smith** And you gotta get it done.

**Terry Tang** And you've got to get it done with, you know, less resources.

**Evan Smith** So I said that the Times is similar to other news organizations in that everyone is going through this. What the Times has in particular to it is its owner. And the second thing I'm obligated to ask you about is the owner. And the reason is he went on Tucker Carlson's podcast this week. Had he not gone on Tucker Carlson's podcast I might not have asked it this early in the conversation. But I've got to ask you about that. The

owner is, of course, Patrick Soon-Shiong, and our very insular, circular, gossipy world we're fascinated by him. Going back more than a year to when your predecessor, Kevin Merida, resigned, there was an allegation of interference in the newsroom, according to reporting in the New York Times. We know famously that he spiked an opinion piece endorsing Kamala Harris during the presidential campaign, leading to the resignation of the opinion editor, your successor. He endorsed cabinet picks on social media, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. And on Tucker Carlson's podcast this week, he was defending his overhaul of the paper, and he was criticizing what he described as the, quote, "left-lean" of, quote "terrible stories written about Donald Trump." Now, we talked about this. In fairness, I think what he meant was editorials or opinion pieces. He did not necessarily mean reported stories, but still I have got to ask you straight away. I have got to ask you straight away, because everybody else in this room would ask if they were sitting up here. Does your owner in any way impact the independence of your newsroom's journalism?

**Terry Tang** Absolutely not. He doesn't intrude. We don't talk about that, and that is my job. Now, if he had my job as the editor, then he could do what he wants.

**Evan Smith** Right, but you have a free hand as editor to make the choices you make.

**Terry Tang** Absolutely, and I don't make all those choices because I have some of the best editors I've ever worked with.

**Evan Smith** They make those choices.

**Terry Tang** They make these choices. We discuss some of those choices, but otherwise it would be a one-person show, and that's me. And that is not what journalism is about. Great journalistic enterprises are collectives. That means everybody is working toward the same mission, but we're not doing each other's jobs. You can't, you know, we're not doing one job. And that's why we, and that's why every editor, whether it's the environment editor, it's the politics editor, the Sacramento editor, city hall editor, city hall bureau chief, all those people are professionals. They have more sources than I could possibly have. So I am in conversation with them, constantly it seems. But it is not my paper, it is not Patrick Soon-Shiong's paper. I mean, he owns it, but in terms of the bespoke news that we're creating every day, that we are hand-creating every day, that is being done by the collective that is a newsroom. And that's one of the great joys of being a journalist is that you're working with a team. You're working with a community in and of itself. And I don't know of very many industries in which that's the case hour after hour. And that's what brings me joy, and that's what keeps people going in the LA Times. Because these are their friends. These are people on the same mission that they're on. And you can't really, you can't put a dollar sign on that.

**Evan Smith** Can you characterize your relationship with the owner? I know you're going to tell me, I can't reveal conversations I have with my boss. But can you characterize a relationship? Is it an open relationship? Do you talk about the paper often? Kind of what's the, give us the color and the play-by-play on that.

**Terry Tang** It's a positive relationship. I mean, if you had a negative relationship with your boss, you're not going to be there.

**Evan Smith** Well, you might be there anyway. You might choose to be.

**Terry Tang** Well, no. But it's, you know, we talk. We don't, we rarely talk, we don't talk about coverage of.

**Evan Smith** You don't talk about coverage?

**Terry Tang** We do not, no.

**Evan Smith** Interesting.

**Terry Tang** No, and because even in that, it would be, you now, sort of a bit intrusive in some ways, but that doesn't mean that.

**Evan Smith** You don't get feedback from him?

**Terry Tang** There are times when he might give me a tip, and I just, I mean anybody can write me a tip.

**Evan Smith** Well, a tip is great, but I'm asking specifically, has he come to you and criticized or he's not come to and taken issue with the journalism that you and your team produced?

**Terry Tang** No.

**Evan Smith** So I read a letter that the LA Times Guild, the union, put out last month, in which they complained that the owner, Dr. Soon-Shiong, has been misrepresenting your journalism out in the world and has shared misinformation about it from, among others, Elon Musk, mischaracterizing or outright saying false things about the work that you've done. Are you aware of that?

**Terry Tang** Yeah, I mean. Well, that's an interpretation of an interpretation. I only look at what it is that we're producing, and I would challenge anyone to look at every piece of journalism we are producing and see if that's been influenced.

**Evan Smith** So what he says out in public doesn't necessarily matter to you in terms of the way you think about it as feedback.

**Terry Tang** Because, you know, if anybody wants to give me feedback, they can say it to my face.

**Evan Smith** Say it to my face.

**Terry Tang** Tell me exactly what you think is wrong. And, you know, Patrick Soon-Shiong has the right to Tweet what he wants. He has, you know, he's got rights to speak to whoever he wants to speak to, and I think that's fine.

**Evan Smith** Okay, let's move off of him, which I know you'll be thrilled to do, and talk about the paper. You run into somebody in the elevator at a downtown office building or at a dinner out one night, and they ask you, average person, what is your vision for the LA Times? What do you tell them? What is the thing that you say to explain the thing in your head for this paper?

**Terry Tang** The paper is over 140 years old, and I don't have a new vision for what the paper should be. Papers are organic living things. They are the creation of the people who are there. My overall mission is that the paper stays as productive and as healthy and thrives and serves the people who live in LA because I grew up in LA.

**Evan Smith** But it's not the same paper that the Chandler zone. I mean, the reality is things change. Evolutions happen.

**Terry Tang** Yeah, but journalism as a practice and as a profession hasn't changed all that much. So the question is, how much do you change that profession? When the Chandlers owned it, there were bureaus all over the world. There were Picassos in the lobby. At the New York Times, there was the idea of, that there was artwork, that the journalists were really treated very differently as they are now, just simply because of resources. But in terms of our mission, it's very much unchanged. It really is how you write a story is unchanged. Probably goes back to about 18, I don't know, the first time was the first reporters put into the field, where I think New York Herald reporters who were sent to cover the Civil War. And they were sent there to write it up. And then there was this new innovation where you would quote people in your story. That was a brand new thing. So, you know, in some ways, the way we do things and our mission hasn't changed.

**Evan Smith** But who you write those stories for, how those stories are distributed. I mean, there are many aspects of this that are totally new and specific to the moment we're in. And so I guess I'm trying to draw you out a little bit on what you think the role and responsibility of the LA Times is today versus before in view of the moment that we are in as a country, as Los Angeles as a city, media as a business.

**Terry Tang** I will tell you, we're working harder than a lot of people I knew when I was younger in this business.

**Evan Smith** Is that right?

**Terry Tang** Oh yeah.

**Evan Smith** Say more about that.

**Terry Tang** Well, I mean, it's just more challenging. You have to do more with less. If you want to maintain the same mission, you want to serve the public, it is much the same. I mean the same quality. No one is changing our editorial standards, and editing standards, how a story is produced. Okay, none of that is changing, but you have fewer people to do it, you have few resources, that just means it's going to be harder to do. So we're working harder. It's a tougher environment to be in.

**Evan Smith** You've got to make choices, right?

**Terry Tang** You do make choices.

**Evan Smith** The old editor of the Dallas Morning News, Mike Wilson, who's now at the New York Times, said to me once as the editor of the Dallas Morning News, we used to be a newspaper of record, now we're a newspaper choice. And he meant with the resources available to us, we have to make decisions about what we cover and what we don't, and I assume that that's the same way with you. The public would love it if you covered everything.

**Terry Tang** Well, you know, I don't know that the public would necessarily. I mean, it used to be there were the resources, you did cover everything. Every tittle and jod of what was happening in a school board. Even the non-functioning, you know, school board meetings that weren't going anywhere. There was nothing on the agenda, you still covered it. We don't do that now. We write about stuff that we feel that the reader really needs to know. So while people will still hear the school board meetings or get the transcripts, they will incorporate that into stories to move the ball ahead instead of simply doing it as a day story.

**Evan Smith** Just turn of the screw stuff.

**Terry Tang** Yes, so that's taken some time, but that's out of necessity.

**Evan Smith** Do you view the Times as a national paper that has exceptional local coverage or as a local paper that has ideally exceptional national coverage?

**Terry Tang** Well, we are. I think that we are a big regional paper. When we look at national coverage, we always want, because California, as we always say, 39 million people.

**Evan Smith** It's one of one, it's not one of many.

**Terry Tang** Right, and it's the sixth largest economy in the world. So when you say California, that is no small shakes. So when we look at our Trump administration coverage, it's very much focused on what do those decisions do to people who live in California? What are the effects on the California Department of Education, our own environmental protection agencies, and our own judges, and the UC system, which is the largest public system, educates in a huge number. I mean, as research institutions go, you couldn't, you know, the UC system stands out globally.

**Evan Smith** And one of the flagship campuses of the UC system is right now in the sites of this administration.

**Terry Tang** Oh, two or three of them.

**Evan Smith** Well but I'm thinking UCLA specifically. I mean they're coming after UCLA no holds barred.

**Terry Tang** Yeah, and Berkeley too, and they're going after, I mean, like yesterday, they're going after the county sheriff. Now, our county sheriff's history is not one of being woke. They're going after the county sheriff for not issuing concealed carry permits fast enough. Because it's taken, you know, because there's only like, I don't know, county sheriffs, I mean again, these are not people who are. I don't think they have any views about Second Amendment. They just have 14 people going through thousands of applications for concealed carry because we are a county of eight million people. And so it may take a year to get your concealed carry. So now, I think it's DOJ has launched an investigation as to why the county sheriff is being slow about, I guess, supporting the Second Amendment rights of people who want concealed carry permits.

**Evan Smith** So, I mean, I guess I'll come back to the answer that you gave, regional. It's a regional. I always thought of the LA Times as a national paper in my mind, but you sort of defined it between the two. I mean because again, you know, the "national media" in big

air quotes is “the problem” in big air quotes. Local news is the antidote to the poison. Proximity is the answer to the problems of getting people to trust you and to respect the work that we should do and all that. I'm just interested in how you define within those parameters.

**Terry Tang** I mean, we are not covering what's happening in Iowa, for instance, and not that there isn't totally relevant, or Florida, very, very relevant news.

**Evan Smith** You don't have bureaus in those regions.

**Terry Tang** We don't have bureaus in those regions, but that's not uninteresting and it's not unimportant. Because in the end, we're all one nation. So what's happening in a Texas federal court is going to bounce right into what's going to happen in California, in LA. So we do cover that when it then does bounce into what's happening in LA. And some of it, if we had the luxury of having national bureaus all over every region in this country, we probably would do more, but since we just don't.

**Evan Smith** The circulation you're trying to achieve, the reach you're trying to achieve, is in Los Angeles.

**Terry Tang** Yes, and California.

**Evan Smith** That is the point. So I'm thinking about how competitive the media market is in Los Angeles, maybe even more competitive than New York. I mean, it's very competitive. How do you think about the competitive set? How does that thinking change over time? We say sometimes, have no competitors, only have collaborators now. We can't afford to be in that defensive crouch. We've got to work with everybody, got to partner with everybody. Are you in that mindset?

**Terry Tang** Absolutely. I mean, I don't think of anybody as a competitor to the LA Times. I mean we can't afford to think of it that way. I don't know if this is from my Seattle, Washington state days, but I do think that the LA Times being the largest media organization in the state on the West coast is a little bit like a mother log on the forest floor, and we do support just through our own reporting. We create an ecosystem that allows smaller organizations to thrive. And the fact is, we break stories, and then some of the smaller organizations will pick it up and do investigations and do their own version. That's just common in journalism, and it's a very good model.

**Evan Smith** Do you make your content available for others to republish for free?

**Terry Tang** A few, a few. Like I think a few organizations, we do. And then of course it goes on the wire, and it's used all over the nation.

**Evan Smith** Do you ever run anybody else's stuff?

**Terry Tang** Yeah, we do.

**Evan Smith** Not just the stuff you pay for, but kind of, you know, the nonprofit ecosystem has started to offer stories for free to news organizations like yours.

**Terry Tang** Well, I'd like to have more partnerships. So we do have partnerships with Zócalo Public Square, which is a terrific organization that is sponsored by Arizona State University. They have a newsroom. They do a lot of more literary, larger, longer pieces.

**Evan Smith** Things that you're not doing yourself.

**Terry Tang** We're not doing ourselves. We are partnered with Kaiser Health News, so they also do kind of consumer facing news, terrific, some of their editors and reporters were once at the LA Times, but that kind of partnership takes time and effort.

**Evan Smith** You have to tend to it every day.

**Terry Tang** You have to tend to it every day.

**Evan Smith** And you know that the American Journalism Project has announced a pretty significant investment in Los Angeles in the form of the LA Local News Initiative. One of the board members of that effort is your predecessor, Kevin Merida. Will you work with them?

**Terry Tang** Yeah, we'll work with anyone. I mean, but I think that they're much more focused on smaller startups, maybe, not startups, but just smaller, maybe more specific to communities in L.A., rather than working with a larger media organization.

**Evan Smith** Of course, it is an ecosystem. It would be great to have all hands on deck, I suspect.

**Terry Tang** Yes.

**Evan Smith** What's your strategy to reach younger readers? Every newspaper is grappling with it.

**Terry Tang** I think every newspaper is grappling with this in the 1980s, but they just thought we'd wait them out. You know, like you'd have kids, you'd buy a house, now you're worried about property taxes, you're worried about school systems, and then you will like subscribe to the paper. And back then there were of course grocery inserts and all that. I mean, we are making efforts on social media, as we always do, and when we did the fire coverage, when we do sports coverage, climate coverage, I'm not sure that we're saying that that's only, we would never say, that's only for people of a certain age. It's a matter of, I mean we have some amazing climate coverage, and I think that speaks to a generation that is really focused on that issue.

**Evan Smith** But you're talking about the realm of the "should." This content "should" be interesting to those folks. But as you know, like the technology sector, the strategy has to be push, not pull. You can't wait for them to come to you. You've got to figure out how to get to them. So "should" is good, but I guess what I'm asking is what strategy do you have to be sure that you're getting your content in front of them, which is a more intentional thing.

**Terry Tang** Well, we're on social media platforms. That's a real challenge. It's very difficult.

**Evan Smith** You have a team doing TikTok, Instagram, stuff like that?

**Terry Tang** Yes, yeah, we do.

**Evan Smith** Is it left to the institution to solve this problem or are individual reporters also drafted into service? I have a good friend who now works for you, who came from Texas named Keri Blakinger.

**Terry Tang** Oh, of course.

**Evan Smith** A criminal justice reporter. Don't mess with Keri Blakinger, let me just say. But she is about as adept at storytelling on social media, TikTok, and other platforms, as anybody I've seen. As an individual reporter, she would be an asset, presumably, in this effort, and I'm just wondering if, in a similar way, other reporters are being drafted into service to make their networks your network.

**Terry Tang** Oh, absolutely, I mean, you know, during the fire coverage, a slew of our reporters became very handy with just doing vertical video. They'd go out to the burn zones, they were practically, you know, the morning after doing video on their own. They had not done that. Now they're very comfortable doing that. Vertical video has become a real staple in the way we do journalism. And that, of course, one good thing about vertical video is that it can go on social platforms easily, and you don't have to read anything.

**Evan Smith** Of course, the thing I'm thinking about is that there was a time not long ago, I'm old enough to remember this, you may be too, when institutions dissuaded or tried to dissuade individuals from doing this kind of work because the institution had to speak with one voice. And now it's basically a collection, it's a collective, it's a collection of voices. And you have to be comfortable with that, even if you're an old-fashioned journalist, you've got to get more comfortable with the idea that different voices are going to put your brand out. And you're at peace with that?

**Terry Tang** Yeah, absolutely.

**Evan Smith** Let me ask you a couple of basic sort of media business rather than L.A. Times questions. So the last really good poll on trust was after the last election. The Gallup poll said that the decline in trust had reached a historic low. Only 31% of people said they trusted the media. Thirty-six percent, more than the 31 percent, said they had no trust at all in the media. 33% said not very much. So 69%, seven in 10, are saying not very much or none. How do we get it back as an industry? What's the strategy to get it back?

**Terry Tang** I don't think that there's an overarching strategy. There's no cure for people who are inundated with misinformation, disinformation. I mean, I think it's very hard for people to tell the difference between a TikTok influencer who's not, is shading the truth or just telling outright falsehoods, and something like what Keri Blakinger would be doing on TikTok. It's very to tell. Because you're not necessarily a student of the issues that they're talking about. But I will tell you that during the fires, no one thought that they could not trust the journalism being produced out of the LA Times.

**Evan Smith** And why is that?

**Terry Tang** Because it was an emergency. They could see that it was like 360 degree coverage, like every aspect of that, and it hit you on the ground where you are. Your concerns are answered. And that's where, you know, trust comes in. So for local papers,

as I think those, I think the surveys also show, that the more local the story, the more the greater the trust.

**Evan Smith** Yeah, that's again, proximity is the answer here in some respects, and brand matters. The fact that the LA Times has been around for 142 years, I mean, we've gone to extraordinary lengths to undermine faith and confidence in institutions over the last 10 years or more, but 142-year-old institution, been doing this work, viewed by the people in the community as credible whether they like everything or not, that helps, that matters.

What about threats to journalists and journalism right now, which seem to be off the charts. We have lawsuits, we have the weaponization of the FCC, we have questions about digital and physical security of the people who work for news organizations. We have the defunding of public media, potentially. I mean, if you believe that hearing the other day, that's the direction that they're going to take this. We had Julie Pace up here a moment ago. We're going to ban people from the White House press pool access questions. I know that we're not supposed to say this is an unprecedented time because nothing is really unprecedented, but this sort of is, Terry.

**Terry Tang** It is. It is. I was talking to Arfa just a little while ago. And I think American journalists, unlike journalists in Hungary, and El Salvador, Turkey, and India, are, we're shocked by this, you know, and maybe we have the privilege of being shocked. Because we've never had to confront this. We've been in kind of a bell jar of feeling quite free to be able to report out as we saw things, and to have access, and to have the First Amendment. Backed up by the First Amendment, backed up by law firms that wanted to stand up for our First Amendment rights.

**Evan Smith** How's that whole law firm standing up thing going right now? I got off the stage with Julie Pace as another law firm had caved. Like, what a weird moment.

**Terry Tang** That's what I'm saying. I mean, we were living in that shell where none of this was happening until about the last two months. So I think American journalists are quite shocked. But that doesn't mean that we should kind of throw in the towel. Of course not, right? I mean that just means that work is harder. That you have to be wiser about how you're doing things and give more punch for the effort. But journalism isn't going to, I mean, journalists, journalism can solve many things. Journalists are part of society, and social issues, journalists can illuminate, but journalists aren't there to solve.

**Evan Smith** Have you had to put new policies in place at the LA Times to account for these greater threats?

**Terry Tang** No, we're very concerned, have always been, way prior to this, about journalistic safety, about the safety of our journalists.

**Evan Smith** Do you worry that in this environment, I want to ask this question in the right way, that some journalists are anticipating what's waiting for them on the other end and are holding back, or are worried about what the reaction will be in this heightened moment, and are therefore kind of pulling their punches a little bit? I mean, it may not be LA Times journalists, but I have this worry. I mean, again, I'm sorry to bring up Patrick again. The phrase was "anticipatory obedience." That was what was said when the op-ed was not published, or the editorial was not published in the LA Times and the Washington Post. That was the phrase they used. I worry that that actually is sort of seeping into journalism

in the main in that people are so afraid of the climate that they're not doing their most aggressive and most robust work. Are you seeing any of that?

**Terry Tang** I'm not seeing that. I mean, I don't know that anybody in this room or any conference of journalists that anyone would raise their hand and say, "Yeah, I am pulling back."

**Evan Smith** But we're the advantaged ones. We can afford to hold off the dogs. Not everybody can.

**Terry Tang** Well, yeah, I guess if you work at the LA Times, then you are privileged.

**Evan Smith** I mean, the ones that are working for more economically challenged news organizations may think, we don't have the luxury to do this. And I just worry for journalism for that reason.

**Terry Tang** There might be, yeah, but I am not personally seeing it. Not in our newsroom.

**Evan Smith** Okay, let me ask you a couple questions from the audience if you don't mind, okay? So Samuel Montenegro. A question for Terry, in your criteria, what is the main reason young people are losing interest in investigative journalism, in creating investigative journalism? How can organizations change this situation? Are you seeing a fall off in the interest of your reporters, younger reporters, to do investigative journalism.

**Terry Tang** No, actually our investigative team is full of people who are, you know, quite relatively new in their careers, relatively early in their careers, because they ask very basic questions. They don't take it for granted. City Hall's functionality. Why do we have such a corrupt City Hall? City Council members, many of them have gone to prison in the last seven or eight years. No, I don't see an age difference or career difference, even.

**Evan Smith** But of course investigative journalism, as we know, very time-consuming, a person who's doing investigative work for you is not publishing on a regular cadence, costs a lot of money to do it. I mean, the question is always at news organizations, is this really, is the juice worth the squeeze on this stuff?

**Terry Tang** Well, it turns out that our readers really appreciate that, and they will subscribe for great investigative breaking news.

**Evan Smith** So in fact, it's a positive.

**Terry Tang** It's a real positive, because people will see, oh, that's a story I can't get anywhere else.

**Evan Smith** Anna Campbell for Terry, what have the successes of De Los, and what is the future of that section and Latinx files?

**Terry Tang** Well we have a very nice, we have Fidel Martinez is the editor of De Los and writes the Latinx files, and it's doing well. We are continuing to really reach out to Latino communities, and we do community actual events in the community. We support the community, and we have editors and writers who are part of that project and continue to be.

**Evan Smith** It's still worthwhile to do, it's still successful in terms of its goals of reaching people.

**Terry Tang** Yes, I would say so.

**Evan Smith** Is it paying for itself?

**Terry Tang** Well, it's like asking the New York Times whether the coverage of the Syria war ever paid for itself.

**Evan Smith** No, no, Wordle pays for that.

**Terry Tang** Exactly. No, I mean, newspapers, that's why it's a collective. You can't have everything pay for itself, that's not the point. Otherwise, there's lots of things that's purposeful.

**Evan Smith** Right, but you know that at times that we talked about earlier where there's an effort to cut overhead, sometimes it's the things that don't pay for themselves that end up on the chopping block. That's what I'm saying.

**Terry Tang** But then that's where mission comes in. That's where you do make choices about what your mission is.

**Evan Smith** So is De Los critical to your mission as you see it?

**Terry Tang** Yeah, I think we'll continue to have De Los. It's an important part of the paper.

**Evan Smith** Charlotte Kramer's question, Charlotte Karner, pardon me, what was the process like reporting on the fires? Did you have a physical newsroom running, or were you and your team working wherever you could?

**Terry Tang** Well, everybody was out, you know, in the burn zones and interviewing people, and so everybody was out. I mean, it was a vast area of, and it was like 7,000 homes destroyed, two communities. So, and then a lot of people were, some were in the newsroom, but mostly people were out. You know videographers, photographers, some video editors were out. But all the reporters were pretty much at the scene of the fires. And that lasted for, you know, a good month. So, and now, even now, now the phase of the reporting has come into understanding the aftermath, which is the environmental effects of that kind of destruction. It's not unlike any kind of bomb.

**Evan Smith** Well, in fact, it's a whole second suite of stories, right?

**Terry Tang** Yes, and then accountability as to why 17 people died in Altadena, which is one of the neighborhoods that was just completely destroyed, a good share, maybe two-thirds of that entire community was destroyed. But 17 people died. They all died on the western part of that area, Altadena, and they didn't receive emergency alerts. So then it became, why did they not receive emergency alerts until it was too late? So what was wrong with the emergency alert system? Our reporters spent days going through thousands of pages of emergency alert, the actual dialog between the people who are in the emergency alert system, to see what they were saying to each other. No one is going to do that, but a newspaper that has the smarts to do it, has the ability to do it, and has the

resources to do it and put it all together. And so there has to be some change in how the emergency alert system works, or at least understanding why it didn't work.

**Evan Smith** Do you think you've done a good job covering Karen Bass's role in that whole situation?

**Terry Tang** I think so. I mean, I think it's been consistent and continuous to understand what her role is. I mean, it's hard to blame a leader for the catastrophe itself, but you do hold people accountable for preparation of a catastrophe that you might have prepared better for, and then certainly post calamity, post disaster, how are you responding? You know, so we've been on that beat. We've got some great city hall reporters, deep sources, who are covering that, really, you know, on a daily basis.

**Evan Smith** Last question from the audience is from Diego Torrealba. Fire accepted here. Among the LA Times published stories during your tenure, which one stands out as most notable and why? So except the fire stories which we've talked about, what else in your time as editor has stood out to you as exceptional journalism?

**Terry Tang** It's so hard to, it's very hard to pick out, partly because I'm too close to it. It's a little bit like, I'll tell you what, you know, is on tomorrow's front page. But I would say one of the most, it was a hard thing to do, and this was published last summer, last June. It was imaginative, which is why I'm talking about it. It was that we did, we tested cannabis, legal cannabis products, which California legalizes all cannabis, right? So we have both the legal market and sort of the non-legal market.

**Evan Smith** You tested them?

**Terry Tang** We tested it for pesticides.

**Evan Smith** Oh, whew. I was like, did you have a pot party in the office? What happened? I didn't understand where this was going.

**Terry Tang** Yeah, well that would have been easier and probably more pleasurable.

**Evan Smith** Right, you would have had a lot of volunteers.

**Terry Tang** A lot of volunteers. Yeah, right. But anyway, so our investigative team took samples of legal cannabis products and sent them to labs to determine whether pesticides were in the oils of the vapes. And it turns out, yeah, there's a lot of toxic stuff in there. And none of it is really regulated. Our system, the California, has three agencies supposedly regulating health and safety for cannabis. None of them did this. And unless we had done that lab testing, no one would have known. And it was so great, because you could go and pick out, you could search, because we had a search engine for your favorite cannabis vape and see what it tested for in terms of toxic pesticides.

**Evan Smith** Very California.

**Terry Tang** Totally California.

**Evan Smith** And great public service journalism. Well, Terry, I know that everybody in this room wishes you well as time goes on, and hopefully you make the best LA Times you can. Give Terry Tang a big hand. Thank you very much.