

SPJ Board Meeting Minutes

September 13, 2003 - Tampa, Florida

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

With President Robert Leger presiding, the meeting of the SPJ Convention Delegates was called to order at 9:10 a.m. on Thursday, Sept. 13, 2003, at the Hyatt Regency in Tampa, Fla.

The following served in leadership positions during the meeting:

Sergeants-at-Arms: Bruce Cadwallader, David Aeikens, and Jeff Douglas

Vote-counters: Guy Baehr, Autumn Sanders, and Holly Fisher

BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTIONS

Leger announced that Katera Bolander had withdrawn her candidacy for the position of student representative. The remaining candidates then addressed the delegates.

President Leger thanked the candidates and introduced Bill McCloskey as "Parliamentarian-for-Life." McCloskey explained voting rules to the delegates.

Ballots were distributed for the election of two new student representatives. Votes were cast and collected by the Sergeants-at-Arms.

The delegates elected Irwin Gratz President-Elect by voice-vote. The delegates elected Jim Highland Vice-President for Campus Chapter Affairs by voice-vote. David Carlson (secretary/treasurer), Jim Parker (director at large), and Neil Ralston (adviser at large) also were elected.

BYLAWS DISCUSSION

Upon a proper motion and second by Don Meyers, Utah, and Dan Kubiske, Washington, DC Pro, the delegates began discussions about the proposed bylaws change with regard to membership dues.

By-Laws Article 12, Section One would read: "National membership dues, as established by the Board of Directors, shall be payable at the time of or before initiation and annual thereafter. Dues shall include membership and a subscription to Quill. Any annual dues increase in excess of 10 percent shall not become effective unless ratified by the convention."

Motion by to amend from Nathan Issacs, William O. Douglas Pro chapter, the motion to lower from ten to five percent the threshold for submitting dues increases to the delegates at convention. The motion was seconded by Bill Norris, Southern California Inland chapter. Discussion ensued.

The vote was 86 yes, 44 no. That was short of the two-thirds vote necessary for an amendment to the by-laws change.

There was additional discussion concerning the By-Laws change as submitted.

The By-Laws change was approved on a vote of 115-20.

Bill Issacs, William O'Douglas Pro Chapter, moved to ask the 2004 convention to amend the just-passed By-Laws to lower the threshold from ten to five percent. Marcus Dyer, Western Washington Pro Chapter, seconded

A voice vote was inconclusive. A showing of cards was conducted. The vote was 94 yes, 36 no.

PREAMBLE CHANGE PROPOSAL

Parliamentarian Bill McCloskey explained a proposal to amend the By-Laws to include "diversity" in the preamble of the By-Laws and suggested a vote to place this before the '04 convention.

Beverly Kees, Northern California Pro, moved to hold a national referendum to adopt new By-Laws language more quickly. Peter Bilodeau, Atlanta Pro, seconded.

Extensive discussion ensued, during which it was determined that a referendum could be conducted by e-mail, but would have to involve an opportunity to vote by all members of the Society.

At the end of the discussion, Kees and Bilodeau withdrew their motion for a referendum. Peter Bilodeau of Atlanta Pro and Beverly Kees seconded a motion to require the board to draft language including diversity in the By-Laws and return a By-Laws amendment to the 2004 convention.

The motion was approved on a voice vote.

CONVENTION RESOLUTIONS

Don Meyers, Utah Pro, moved, and Peter Bilodeau, Atlanta Pro, seconded a motion to approve the resolutions as a block. The approved resolutions are attached to these minutes.

Before discussion, President Leger announced the results of voting for Student Representative:

Amanda Lutz, 92
Tasha Braggs, 83
Jennifer Boresz, 62
Catherine Varnum, 18
(Lutz and Braggs elected)

President Leger allowed minor changes in resolution wording, then all but the Cuba resolution were approved by voice vote.

After a brief discussion, the Cuba resolution also passed by voice vote.

DUES DISCUSSION

Stephanie Reitz, Connecticut Pro, and Dan Kubiske, Washington Pro seconded the following resolution:

DUES FREEZE

WHEREAS, delegates to the 1992 convention approved an automatic dues increase for two years; and WHEREAS, delegates to the 1998 convention suspended the automatic dues increase for two years; and WHEREAS, the board of directors continued the freeze for two more years; and WHEREAS, dues increased for the 2002-2003 fiscal year by 3 percent; and WHEREAS, the board of directors has approved a budget for 2003-2004 that is balanced without an increase in dues; therefore BE IT RESOLVED, that the automatic increase in dues be suspended for one year.

The resolution was approved on a voice vote.

The business session was adjourned at 10:40 AM

Respectfully Submitted,
Irwin L. Gratz, Secretary-Treasurer

2003 SPJ National Convention Resolutions
As adopted by convention delegates

Resolution

— WHEREAS one of the primary goals of the Society of Professional Journalists is to promote journalism education, and

— WHEREAS journalism education is more important in an era in which governments and business

organizations are increasingly training themselves to manipulate the news media, and
— WHEREAS governments are closing off sources of information, and
— WHEREAS Texas A&M University, a state-supported institution, is considering a proposal to close down its journalism department, and
— WHEREAS that department has demonstrated its importance in preserving a free and open press, and
— WHEREAS other colleges and universities across the country are taking similar steps to scale back on the funding of journalism departments and programs,
— THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Society of Professional Journalists urge the administration and the Board of Regents of Texas A&M University to continue to fund and strengthen its journalism department,
— BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the society use its influence as an advocate of journalism education to encourage colleges and universities to maintain and bolster journalism programs.

Submitted by the Houston Professional Chapter

Resolution

— WHEREAS the right of citizens to participate in public discussions and to express their grievances regarding both public and private matters is a hallmark of American democracy, and
— WHEREAS the news media is a legitimate outlet to express those grievances, and
— WHEREAS a free press as envisioned by the Constitution can only exist when there is a free and unfettered relationship between journalists and sources of information, and
— WHEREAS, there has been a disturbing trend in the United States to try and silence grievances through Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), and
— WHEREAS, a recent lawsuit in Cincinnati has been filed against news sources after their grievances against local dental clinics became public via television news stories, and
— WHEREAS this lawsuit threatens to intimidate other citizens who might bring their grievances to the media, and
— WHEREAS states such as California and Massachusetts have successfully passed laws to curb SLAPPs,
— THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the membership and leadership of SPJ condemns the use of the courts in general, and SLAPPs in particular, to damage the First Amendment rights of citizens and the relationship between journalists and their sources of information.
— BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that SPJ calls on state legislatures to pass anti-SLAPP legislation so that all 50 states will have the means to curb these insidious lawsuits. SPJ calls on journalists and media organizations to actively promote and support such legislation in their respective states.
— BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That because the trend of SLAPP suits poses a direct threat to the ability of journalists to gather and report information of interest to citizens, SPJ calls on journalists to report aggressively and thoroughly on SLAPP suits and their impact on the First Amendment rights of all Americans.

Cuba Resolution

— Whereas, in April 2003, the Cuban government arrested 78 dissidents, including 22 independent journalists, who were sentenced to prison terms of more than 20 years, and
— Whereas, the independent journalists were arrested for transmitting articles to news media outside Cuba, and
— Whereas freedom of the press is guaranteed by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Cuba is a signatory and
— Whereas freedom of the press is guaranteed by the constitution of the other 19 Latin American republics, by the Charter of the Organization of American States, and by the Declaration of Chapultepec of 1994,
— Therefore Be It Resolved that the Society of Professional Journalists express its profound indignation to President Fidel Castro for the unjust imprisonment of our colleagues who were acting as journalists and call upon him to release them, and other prisoners of conscience, and to permit the free practice of journalism in Cuba.

Submitted by the International Journalism Committee

Resolution

- Whereas public access to information about crime on our nation's college campuses is vital for community safety, and
- Whereas campus communities need to know how colleges discipline students who commit criminal acts in order to judge the fairness of such disciplinary systems, and
- Whereas news media covering campus communities have a responsibility to provide their audiences and readers with the information they need to avoid becoming victims of crime and to evaluate the procedures in place for dealing with criminals, and
- Whereas college disciplinary systems are often the only place in which campus crimes are adjudicated, and
- Whereas the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act protects many student records from public disclosure but allows colleges and universities to release the final results of disciplinary procedures against students found responsible for violating student conduct codes by committing sexual offenses or other crimes of violence, and
- Whereas most schools still refuse to release such information as a matter of policy,
- Therefore be it resolved that the Society of Professional Journalists' 2003 National Convention urge Congress to require colleges and universities to make public at least those disciplinary records that are not protected by FERPA's privacy provisions as a condition for their receiving federal funding, and
- Be it further resolved that the convention endorse and support efforts by SPJ and Security on Campus Inc. to encourage passage of such legislation.

Submitted by the FOI Committee and its Subcommittee on Campus Crime

Thanking President Robert Leger

- WHEREAS Robert Leger has set an example for all journalists through his leadership of the Society of Professional Journalists, and
- WHEREAS he has worked tirelessly as a leader of the Society at both the local and national levels, and
- WHEREAS he has long been an advocate and a living example of the ethical practice of journalism, and
- WHEREAS he worked to assure the Society of Professional Journalists' pre-eminent position among journalism organizations while encouraging cooperation among those organizations, and
- WHEREAS he succeeded in efforts to raise the Society's media profile on journalism issues, and
- WHEREAS he has given selflessly of his time and his talents for the benefit of the Society and its members,
- THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Society of Professional Journalists commend Robert Leger for his dedication and sacrifice and express its gratitude for a job well done.

Submitted by the Resolutions Committee

Thanking the host chapter

- WHEREAS the Mid-Florida Professional Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists has the distinction of staging SPJ's 2003 national convention, and
- WHEREAS a national convention of the nation's largest journalism organization requires extensive planning, and
- WHEREAS Marcia Biggs, Mac McKerral and other members of the Mid-Florida Chapter have put in years of effort to make this convention a memorable event, and
- WHEREAS the convention has indeed been both stellar and memorable,
- THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that these delegates gathered in Tampa express their heartfelt appreciation for a job well done.

Submitted by the Resolutions Committee

Thanking SPJ headquarters staff

- WHEREAS the Society of Professional Journalists' headquarters staff has devoted months of planning to the staging of this annual convention, and

— WHEREAS that effort culminated in packing up and moving virtually the entire headquarters across the country, and
— WHEREAS managing a convention such as this involves long hours and little sleep, and
— WHEREAS staff members have carried out their duties with great skill and good cheer,
— THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that members of the Society of Professional Journalists express their sincere appreciation to the dedicated members of the SPJ headquarters staff.

Submitted by the Resolutions Committee

Resolution for Fallen Journalists

— WHEREAS, the conduct of war by democratically elected governments should require the consent of the governed, and such consent should be informed consent; and
— Whereas, U.S. Sen. Hiram Johnson of California summed up the obstacles in providing adequate information for that consent when he said in 1918, “The first casualty, when war comes, is truth;” and
— Whereas, the great difficulties and obstacles inherent in obtaining truth in wartime can require the ultimate sacrifice by journalists in theaters of war; and
— Whereas, news organizations in the United States of America spent years arguing for better access to U.S. forces engaged in military operations; and
— Whereas, the Department of Defense responded with a program of “embedding” willing journalists in U.S. military units in Iraq; and
— Whereas, Michael Kelly, editor-at-large of The Atlantic Monthly, and David Bloom, correspondent for NBC News, joined hundreds of their colleagues in accepting Pentagon assignment to military units; and
— Whereas, these reporters provided real-time coverage of a nation involved in war, and did so from the varied backgrounds, perspectives and missions that best serve readers, viewers and listeners in a diverse democracy; and
— Whereas, Michael Kelly died in Iraq as a result of hostile action and David Bloom also died there during his coverage of major military operations; and
— Whereas, Elizabeth Neuffer of The Boston Globe, a non-embedded journalist, died in Iraq during her coverage of military operations eight days after the U.S. government said major military operations had concluded, and Jeremy Little, an Australian journalist working for NBC News, later died in Iraq as a result of hostile action; and
— Whereas, journalists from around the world, including, Terry Lloyd of Great Britain, Paul Moran of Australia, Kaveh Golestan of Iran, Christian Liebig of Germany, Julio Anguita Parrado of Spain, Tareq Ayyoub of Jordan, Jose Couso of Spain, Taras Protsyuk of The Ukraine, Richard Wild of Great Britain, and Palestinian Dana Mazen have died while covering the continuing conflict in Iraq;
— THEREFORE be it resolved that the Society of Professional Journalists, in convention in Tampa, Fla., hereby convey its appreciation and honor to Michael Kelly and David Bloom and to all other journalists who have died in Iraq for their courage and dedication to give the world the truth about the continuing conflict there; and
— Further be it resolved that The Society extend its condolences to the families and loved ones of all journalists who have died in the line of duty in Iraq and elsewhere;
— Further be it resolved that The Society call upon journalists everywhere to follow the examples of Michael Kelly, David Bloom, Elizabeth Neuffer, Jeremy Little, Terry Lloyd, Paul Moran, Kaveh Golestan, Christian Liebig, Julio Anguita Parrado, Tareq Ayyoub, Jose Couso, Taras Protsyuk, Richard Wild and Dana Mazen in fearlessly pursuing the truth wherever it needs to be found.