

**MINUTES
MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS
MAY 23, 2012
CONFERENCE CALL**

Meeting Called to Order

With President-elect Sonny Albarado presiding, the meeting of the executive committee of the Society of Professional Journalists was called to order at 12:03 p.m. EST on Wednesday, May 23, 2012, via conference call.

In addition to Albarado, the following were present: Past President Hagit Limor; Secretary-Treasurer David Cuillier; Vice President for Campus Chapter Affairs Neil Ralston; Director at-Large Bill McCloskey. Staff members present were Executive Director Joe Skeel, Associate Executive Director Chris Vachon and Director of Education Scott Leadingham. Others in attendance were Student Representative Gideon Grudo, Campus Adviser-at-Large Kym Fox, Region 3 Director Michael Koretzky, SDX Foundation President Steve Geimann, Ethics Chair Kevin Smith, Region 4 Director Liz Hansen.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Oklahoma chapter situation after chapter treasurer, and national board member, Scott Cooper admitted to stealing money from the chapter's bank account. In the letter, Cooper resigned as treasurer of the chapter.

Albarado informed the group that he joined a meeting of the Oklahoma chapter via Skype on Friday, May 8. During the meeting, Albarado learned that chapter representatives are meeting with an attorney and the prosecutor to discuss their options regarding civil and criminal charges against Cooper. A forensic auditor has volunteered to conduct an audit for the chapter.

The situation was discovered when a chapter check to a vendor had insufficient funds. Cooper admitted, in writing to chapter president Scott Carter, that he stole about \$18,000. The chapter reviewed bank statements from 2008-12 and discovered \$43,000 worth of checks written to Cooper and signed by Cooper. The deposits have not been reviewed yet.

The chapter has closed the bank account and opened a new one. They put new procedures in place: three members are now overseeing the account and yearly audits will be conducted.

Oklahoma chapter annual reports for 2008 and 2009 provided no financial information and did not include the required three-person review. The 2010 annual report included false bank information from Cooper.

The chapter has been able to pay past due bills through donations from chapter members, local newsrooms and from the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation. The donations, so far, total \$61,000.

Executive Director Skeel updated the group on a few points. When he was first informed by the Oklahoma chapter president, Scott Carter, Skeel contacted president Ensslin and Baker Hostetler representative Laurie Babinski.

Babinski recommended that the chapter handle the matter because they are the victims. The national organization's role is to offer support and guidance to the chapter.

Skeel, Ensslin and Albarado have been in regular communication with the chapter. Information has been shared with the board and the members once it has been verified. Because of this, the communication process has been methodical and cautious.

As Regional Director, Cooper had a Region 8 fund. Information about the account has not been easy to acquire. Skeel has been working on the Region 8 account and is waiting for a call back from the bank

where the chapter account was located to inquire about another account for Cooper at that same bank. The money in the regional fund came from the chapters in the region. The amount in the regional fund in November 2010 was about \$3,000 according to Skeel. Cooper reported to Skeel that there is no money left in the regional fund.

The question of Cooper's membership in SPJ was raised. The group hoped that Cooper would resign his membership voluntarily, but if not, the committee discussed asking for his resignation.

Upon proper motion and second, by Limor and Ralston, respectively, the executive committee intends to make a recommendation to the board at the June meeting that Cooper's membership resignation be accepted or requested.

Future training and rules for chapters regarding finances was discussed. The chapter leaders' session at convention is one place to spend time with chapters on this subject; another is the Scripps Leadership Institute.

Ensslin put together an ad hoc committee of Albarado, Eckert and Kevin Smith to look into what, if any, procedures/practices should be put in place moving forward regarding finances for both chapters and regional funds. The committee is working to have recommendations prepared for the July executive committee meeting.

There is a June 9 deadline for interim Region 8 Director candidates to step forward. A new regional director will be selected at the June board meeting.

Adjournment

Upon proper motion and second, by Limor and McCloskey, respectively, the meeting adjourned at 12:46 p.m. EST.