

Resolutions – 2023
September 30, 2023

The Resolutions Committee met in person Friday, September 29, 2023 and Saturday, September 30, 2023, to review and discuss resolutions submitted for consideration by the SPJ delegates.

The Committee recommends positive consideration of the eight resolutions as a package.

- **Resolution 1:** Honoring Jerome “Jerry” Merle Ceppos for a career spanning more than 50 years,
- **Resolution 2:** Thanking Society of Professional Journalists President Claire Regan
- **Resolution 3:** Thanking the staff of the Society of Professional Journalists
- **Resolution 4:** Threats to Press Freedom in Nicaragua
- **Resolution 5:** Iran and Press Freedom
- **Resolution 6:** Threats to journalists in Central America
- **Resolution 7:** Support of Electronic Media Coverage of Former President Trump’s Criminal Trials
- **Resolution 8:** Opposing Improper Information Gatekeeping

Number: 1

A Resolution Honoring Jerry Ceppos

Submitted by: Louisiana State University Manship School of Mass Communication Dean Kim Bissell and the Manship School faculty, staff, students, alumni and former Interim Dean Josh Grimm. Also included in this resolution are officers from the 2022 and 2023 LSU SPJ student chapter. 2022-2023 officers are Josh Archote, president; Gabrielle Jimenez, vice president; Piper Hutchinson, secretary; Domenic Purdy, treasurer; Claire Sullivan, social media coordinator; and Freda Yarbrough Dunne, LSU faculty adviser. 2023-2024 officers are Gabrielle Jimenez, president; Lizzie Falcetti, vice president; Maddie Scott, secretary-treasurer; Claire Sullivan, social media coordinator; and Will Mari. LSU faculty adviser.

Resolutions Committee Recommendation: Positive

WHEREAS Jerome “Jerry” Merle Ceppos was born in Washington, D.C., on October 14, 1946, and died in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on July 29, 2022;

WHEREAS In a career spanning more than 50 years, Ceppos was a top editor at one of the nation’s foremost newspaper companies, dean of two major journalism schools and a 2016 fellow of the Society of Professional Journalists. As an editor and later an educator, he drove a focus on the new technology and its remaking of society. He also championed diversity in the newsroom and the classroom;

WHEREAS Ceppos led the “San Jose Mercury News” when digital media was exploding with innovation, winning two Pulitzer Prizes as its managing editor. He would rise to be the top news officer of Knight Ridder newspapers, including the “Mercury News,” “Miami Herald,” “The Philadelphia Inquirer,” “Detroit Free Press,” “The Charlotte Observer,” “The Kansas City Star” and 26 other daily papers;

WHEREAS as a self-described "geeky" student at Northwood High School in Silver Spring, Maryland, Ceppos edited the school paper, “The Red and Black.” At the University of Maryland, he edited “The Diamondback” and graduated in 1969 with a degree in journalism. After college, Ceppos was a reporter and editor at the “Rochester Democrat and Chronicle” in New York for three years. In 1972, he moved south to become an editor at “The Miami Herald,” the beginning of a long career with Knight Newspapers, later Knight Ridder;

WHEREAS In 1981, Ceppos moved to San Jose, where he quickly rose through the editing ranks. The “Mercury News” Pulitzer Prizes when he was managing editor were for reporting on massive transfers of personal wealth by President Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines out of his country, and for coverage of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake;

WHEREAS In 1996, a year after Ceppos became executive editor, the “Mercury News” published a three-part investigative series, “Dark Alliance,” which made the sensational charge that the crack epidemic raging in Los Angeles was largely sparked by two Nicaraguan emigres selling large amounts of cocaine to raise funds for a CIA-backed rebel army in their home country. An illustration accompanying the stories showed a person smoking crack, superimposed over the logo of the CIA;

WHEREAS When three newspapers, “The New York Times,” “The Washington Post” and “The Los Angeles Times,” published major pieces calling into question the reporting in “Dark Alliance,” Ceppos assigned a reporter and editors uninvolved in the original stories to re-report them;

WHEREAS On May 11, 1997, he published a front-page column, saying the Dark Alliance series had "oversimplified the complex issues of how the crack epidemic in America grew" and "did not include information that contradicted a central assertion of the series." He took personal responsibility for the flawed work, saying, "Few things in life are harder than owning up to one's shortcomings." He said the paper had failed to meet its high standards and would overhaul some of its editing processes;

WHEREAS Though Ceppos faced complaints he had caved to pressure, he was widely praised for accepting criticism and acting transparently. "His candor and self-criticism set a high standard for cases in which journalists make egregious errors," said “The New York Times” in an editorial. He would later receive an award from the Society for his "superior ethical conduct" in handling the aftermath of the series;

WHEREAS In 1999, Ceppos was promoted to vice president for news of Knight Ridder, a role in which, for six years, he identified and recruited top editors, set quality and ethical standards, oversaw the company's Washington and foreign bureaus and, as he put it, "led sometimes recalcitrant newsrooms into the digital age."

WHEREAS Ceppos left Knight Ridder in 2005, just before the publicly traded company was sold and broken up. After consulting for several years, he began a new career as an educator, telling friends he always failed at retirement;

WHEREAS Appointed dean of the Reynolds School of Journalism at the University of Nevada/ Reno in 2008, Ceppos raised the funds to renovate the school's building and update its technology for the future;

WHEREAS After three years at Reynolds, Ceppos moved in 2011 to the Manship School, where he was dean for seven years before transitioning into a full-time teaching role, giving courses on media ethics, American media history and a seminar on fairness in journalism;

WHEREAS Ceppos diversified the faculty and found the resources to endow a chair in race, media and cultural literacy;

WHEREAS As dean of the Manship School, Ceppos started a news service to help fill a void left by declining mainstream news outlets, assigning student journalists to cover state government and undertake investigative projects. He urged them to dig into unsolved murders by Ku Klux Klansmen during the civil rights era, and 90 news sites in Louisiana and Mississippi have run stories by Manship students;

WHEREAS Ceppos' last published piece appeared several weeks before his death in the "Inter Mountain," a newspaper in Elkins, West Virginia. It was an appreciation of his high school newspaper adviser, Mary Lee Ruddle, a West Virginia native who died at 95 in June 2022. She had recently told Ceppos how proud she was of his accomplishments. "That's how Miss Ruddle — to this day, none of us dares call her anything other than '*Miss Ruddle*' — was, an unrelenting coach who demanded high standards but, importantly, assured us that we could meet her requirements. Her confidence was important for a geeky high-school boy."

WHEREAS Friends and family gathered on **October 20, 2022**, at LSU to celebrate Ceppos' life, leadership, public service and friendship, The Manship School and the LSU SPJ chapter resolve to honor Jerry Ceppos with this resolution marking his remarkable career and life that was foremost led by his kindness, compassion and attention to details. As Ceppos would say to any student, entry-level or seasoned journalist – "Make Your Words Count";

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Society, meeting in convention September 30, 2023, in Las Vegas, honors Ceppos' service and commitment to the field of journalism and the example he set;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be presented to Ceppos' family.

Number: 2

A Resolution Thanking Society of Professional Journalists President Claire Regan

Submitted by: Resolutions Committee

Resolutions Committee Recommendation Positive

WHEREAS Claire Regan is completing her one-year term as the 106th president of the Society of Professional Journalists;

WHEREAS President Regan showed leadership and strength as we dealt with contentious issues within the Society and giving enormous amounts of her personal time to guide the organization during a time of leadership transition;

WHEREAS she set goals to increase diversity, inclusion and equity in our organization and kept this commitment by exploring all areas of the Society to make her vision a reality;

WHEREAS President Regan instituted a policy of making herself available for individual talks with members on a regular basis, thereby providing a more direct and open line of communication with the membership,

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Society of Professional Journalists, meeting at a convention September. 30, 2023, in Las Vegas, from members across the country thank President Regan for her years of dedication, commitment and courage to lead the Society

Number: 3

A Resolution Thanking the Staff of the Society of Professional Journalists

submitted by: The Resolutions Committee

Resolutions Committee Recommendation: Positive

WHEREAS the headquarters staff of the Society of Professional Journalists is a small but mighty band of first-rate people who work hard every day to make journalism and journalists themselves stronger;

WHEREAS the Society headquarters staff has stayed connected and committed to the cause of journalism on behalf of the Society's members despite working from home and during a time of staff changes and financial insecurity,

WHEREAS every staff member is responsible individually for the success of the Society, and all of them are the backbone of the Society every day of every year,

WHEREAS Interim executive Director Jennifer Royer, managed the SPJ team in a tumultuous time to help make the Society a better place for all journalists;

WHEREAS even with the fiscal and staff issues facing the organization, Jennifer Royer and her team stepped up to organize the 2023 SPJ National Convention in Las Vegas with exciting and innovative programming;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Society of Professional Journalists, meeting in convention September 30, 2023, in Las Vegas, offers deeply felt and greatly appreciated thanks to the Society staff for its commitment to excellence for the Society all year round, especially during yet another great convention.

Number: 4

A Resolution on threats to Press Freedom in Nicaragua

Submitted by the International Journalism Community

Co-signers: Louisiana Pro Chapter

Resolutions Committee Recommendation: Positive

WHEREAS, Nicaragua is a signatory to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19 of which states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers,” and

WHEREAS, Nicaragua is also a signatory to the 1994 Declaration of Chapultepec, which states in its preamble: "Wherever the media can function unhindered and determine their own direction and manner of serving the public there is a blossoming of the ability to seek information, to disseminate it without restraints, to question it without fear, and to promote the free exchange of ideas and opinions. But wherever freedom of the press is curtailed, for whatever reasons, the other freedoms vanish," and

WHEREAS, Principle 4 of the Declaration of Chapultepec also states: “Freedom of expression and of the press are severely limited by murder, terrorism, kidnapping, pressure, intimidation, the unjust imprisonment of journalists, the destruction of facilities, violence of any kind and impunity for perpetrators,” and

WHEREAS, the government of President Daniel Ortega Saavedra has persisted in his policy of closing independent media outlets and arresting, imprisoning and exiling journalists, and

WHEREAS, in February 2023 the Nicaraguan government stripped more than 300 Nicaraguans of their citizenship and sent them into exile, including several prominent journalists, among them Carlos Fernando Chamorro; and

WHEREAS, more than 180 Nicaraguan journalists remain in exile in Costa Rica trying to keep press freedom alive in Nicaragua by reporting from abroad, including Lucía Pineda Ubau, a television journalist imprisoned in 2018 for reporting on the street protests against President Ortega’s dictatorship; Néstor Arce Aburto, who livestreamed protests before making a narrow escape, and Octavio Enríquez, whose family faced threats as he reported on corruption,

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Society of Professional Journalists, meeting September 30, 2023, in Las Vegas, condemns these violations of freedom of the press in Nicaragua, and expresses solidarity with its Nicaraguan colleagues as they seek to report the news factually despite a climate of hostility and intimidation; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that SPJ calls upon President Ortega to respect the Nicaraguan government's obligations under the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration of Chapultepec by releasing any and all journalists being held for exercising their rights and duties as journalists, by allowing all those in exile to return to Nicaragua to practice their profession, and by desisting from further arrests of journalists, from police raids on media organizations and from acts of intimidation and repression against journalists and their organizations; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this resolution be sent to the Nicaraguan ambassador to the United States, to the office of President Ortega, to the secretary-general of the Organization of American States and to Volker Türk, the United Nations high commissioner for human rights.

Number: 5

Resolution on Iran and Press Freedom

Submitted by the International Community

Resolutions Committee Recommendation: Positive

WHEREAS following the outbreak in Iran of demonstrations protesting the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini a year ago while in police custody more than 20 journalists were arrested merely because they covered those demonstrations, and

WHEREAS the Iranian government also arrested journalists covering Amini's funeral, and

WHEREAS many of the journalists who were arrested were also placed in solitary confinement and forcefully interrogated at Evin Prison, considered one of the worst prisons in the world, and

WHEREAS threats have been made against Iranian journalists in the United States and against organizations hosting those journalists

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Society of Professional Journalists, meeting in convention September 30, 2023, in Las Vegas, strongly asserts that journalists in Iran must be allowed to report freely and do their job to keep people around the world informed of what is happening in Iran. All journalists who have been arrested must be released without charges, their equipment should be returned and they should not face further persecution.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Society also condemns efforts to silence journalists speaking out on behalf of those arrested in Iran.

Number: 6

**Resolution on threats to journalists in Central America
Submitted by the International Community**

Resolutions Committee Recommendation: Positive

WHEREAS journalists in Central America remain under threat from government and paramilitary organizations; and

WHEREAS a free press is the cornerstone of democracy and civil society, and

WHEREAS the people of Central America have expressed their desire for more equitable societies and freedom of expression, and

WHEREAS dire threats remain against press freedom in Central America, and

WHEREAS, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 73 news media workers have been killed in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua in the past 30 years, and

WHEREAS the governments of these four countries are also taking actions that restrict the ability of journalists to carry out their job, and

WHEREAS the Guatemalan government has regularly engaged in actions to prevent media outlets from reporting on corruption, and

WHEREAS a primary focus of the Guatemalan government efforts are aimed at **elPeriódico**, including arresting its founder on financial violation charges and four of its reporters for “violence against women” because of a story that linked the daughter of the president of the Constitutional Court to corrupt practices, and

WHEREAS a growing number of journalists in El Salvador are finding that their mobile phones have been infected with the Pegasus spyware, which is only available to government agencies, and

WHEREAS a proposed law in El Salvador includes a prison sentence of 15 years if a news organization reports on gang activity in the country, and

WHEREAS Honduras has the largest numbers of journalists killed in Central America with no progress on arresting their murderers, and

WHEREAS the court system in Honduras is being used by major landowners to prevent journalists from covering indigenous affairs, and

WHEREAS the Nicaraguan government has continued its long-time feud with La Prensa, the oldest newspaper in the country, including charging reporters with conspiracy against the state because of their reporting on a group of nuns deported by the government, and

WHEREAS the Nicaraguan government arrested, charged and convicted the publisher of La Prensa of money laundering and “fake news” without allowing public access to the proceedings, and

WHEREAS in 2023 alone the Nicaraguan government has closed about 20 independent news outlets, accusing the operators of disrupting society,

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Society of Professional Journalists, meeting in convention September 30, 2023, in Las Vegas, calls on the governments in Central America to immediately order prosecutors to move with all due haste to identify, charge and try the murderers of our colleagues; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the Society calls on these governments to respect their obligations under the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration of Chapultepec by releasing any and all journalists being held for exercising their rights and duties as journalists; and by desisting from further arrests of journalists, from police raids on media organizations and from engaging in acts of intimidation and repression against journalists and their organizations, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this resolution be sent to the Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemispheric Affairs, the Secretary-General of the Organization of American States and to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Number: 7

A Resolution in Support of Electronic Media Coverage of Former President Trump's Criminal Trials

Submitted by: Resolutions Committee

Recommendation of Resolutions Committee: POSITIVE

WHEREAS the United States Supreme Court has recognized that trials are “public property,” and that the First Amendment and Sixth Amendment guarantee both the accused and the public a right to a publicly conducted trial, assuring that justice is dispensed legitimately and without favor;

WHEREAS the former president of the United States has been indicted on felony charges and is facing trial in at least two federal jurisdictions, the U.S. district courts for the District of Columbia and the Southern District of Florida;

WHEREAS the offenses charged in these indictments go to issues of paramount public concern, including efforts at destabilizing the nation’s electoral system by, according to federal prosecutors, attempting to overturn the results of a legitimately conducted election for president of the United States, manifesting in deadly violence at the United States Capitol;

WHEREAS the rule that prohibits cameras or other electronic recording devices in federal criminal trials is 77 years old, a relic of a time when videography was a novelty and not an everyday reality of American life, and when cameras were noisy and obtrusive and difficult to operate in a courtroom non-disruptively;

WHEREAS while cameras in courts were a rarity at the time the federal prohibition was enacted in 1946, all 50 states now make allowances for photographic and videographic coverage, with no indication of any detrimental impact on the ability of courts to dispense justice;

WHEREAS two successful federal pilots of cameras in civil trials and appellate hearings demonstrated conclusively that it is eminently possible, using contemporary technology, for cameras to operate unobtrusively in a way that contributes to public understanding of the judicial system;

WHEREAS the interests of history require that these groundbreaking criminal cases – the first involving a former president of the United States as a defendant – be memorialized in a form other than artists’ pencil drawings;

WHEREAS the same type of civil unrest that resulted in the lethal attack on the U.S. Capitol and its police force on Jan. 6, 2021, is foreseeable if the public doubts the legitimacy of the

former president's trials – as former president Trump himself has foretold, using social media to warn of “death and destruction” if his followers perceive that he has been treated unjustly;

WHEREAS the advent of social media, “deepfake” technology and other developments antedating the enactment of Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 53, and the leading federal court cases interpreting it, renders it impracticable for judges to control the flow of inaccurate or even wholly fabricated information about trials that is calculated to inflame outrage, without the antidote of reliable first-hand observation to inoculate a distrustful public;

WHEREAS the courtrooms in which the former president's trials are scheduled to take place are so small that only a handful of public observers will be able to view the proceedings in-person, and;

WHEREAS legal counsel for the former president has publicly declared that electronic media coverage would in no way interfere with Mr. Trump's ability to obtain a fair trial, and to the contrary, would be desirable for public understanding of the proceedings.

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Society of Professional Journalists, meeting in convention September 30, 2023, in Las Vegas, calls on Congress and the federal judiciary to take every necessary step, with immediate dispatch, to ensure that still and video cameras – whether operated by the news media, or by the courts themselves – memorialized the proceedings in each trial in which the former president is a defendant;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Society calls on the Judicial Conference and the applicable district courts to use routinely available technology – including technology already in use successfully in the state-court prosecution of former President Trump in Fulton County, Georgia – to livestream the trial proceedings on YouTube or a comparable public-facing platform, with reasonable safeguards the courts may find necessary to protect legitimate interests in juror confidentiality and the security of classified documents;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the Society urges the federal judiciary to ensure that, at a minimum, the public receives what it received from the U.S. Supreme Court during the height of the COVID pandemic – the ability to listen to real-time audio of the court proceedings, and an archival copy of each proceeding accessible for playback – which is the very least that history requires of these unprecedented trials.

Number: 8

A Resolution Opposing Improper Information Gatekeeping

Submitted by Kathryn Foxhall, SPJ DC

Committee Recommendation: POSITIVE

WHEREAS the Society of Professional Journalists knows that the control of information by people in power is one of the most abusive, corrosive and deadly things in human societies;

WHEREAS the Society of Professional Journalists [has documented](#) the pervasiveness of bans in organizations on employees or others speaking to the press or on their speaking to the press without reporting to authorities, often through public information offices;

WHEREAS the Society of Professional Journalists, as the world nears four years of the Covid pandemic, recognizes that former Centers for Disease Control and Prevention media relations director [has said](#) these controls and others became tighter on that agency over several presidential administrations, that they constrain the agency's ability to get its messages out,

WHEREAS the Society of Professional Journalists understands that such controls cannot be in effect without frequently limiting what people will tell journalists, including information that is critical to public understanding;

WHEREAS the Society celebrates what is believed to be the first suit by a journalist challenging these gag rules in a U.S. public agency; that is, the legal action filed in August by Brittany Hailer against the Allegheny County Jail;

WHEREAS the Society understands that such limitations on the independent information gathering will severely harm journalist's ability to overcome existential threats including pandemics and climate change;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED the Society of Professional Journalists, meeting in convention in September 30, 2023, in Las Vegas, calls on reporters, editors and publishers everywhere to eschew such arguments as "good reporters get the story anyway" and actively explain and openly oppose these permission-to-speak restrictions, just as journalists would expose other corruption;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the Society communicate with Freedom House; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; and the World Health Organization to ask them to recognize these controls as violations of press freedom and threats to public health and urge those organizations to oppose them in all nations.