

**MINUTES
MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS
JANUARY 8, 2011
UNION STATION HOTEL, NASHVILLE**

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

With President Hagit Limor presiding, the meeting of the executive committee of the Society of Professional Journalists was called to order at 9:10 a.m. on Saturday, January 8, 2011, at the Union Station Hotel in Nashville.

ROLL CALL

In addition to Limor, the following were present: President-Elect Darcie Lunsford; Secretary-Treasurer John Ensslin; Vice President for Campus Chapter Affairs Neil Ralston; Immediate Past President Kevin Smith; Director at-Large Bill McCloskey; Region 12 Director Sonny Albarado.

Staff members in attendance were Executive Director Joe Skeel, Associate Executive Director Chris Vachon and Communications Director Scott Leadingham.

MEETING MINUTES APPROVED

Upon proper motion and seconded by Lunsford and McCloskey, respectively, the committee approved the minutes from the following executive committee meetings:

July 24, 2010, New Orleans

Nov. 18, 2010, Conference Call

Dec. 1, 2010, Conference Call

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

President Limor opened by reading 2011 news industry predictions by Steve Buttry, who predicted merging and closures of several journalism organizations and associations. She stated that SPJ is in sound financial position now and for the foreseeable future.

Limor provided an update of SPJ's advocacy and media inquiries over the past five months.

The committee discussed going forward with creating a formal crisis management plan for dealing with media incidents and providing crisis communications training for board leaders and key staff.

Executive Director Skeel reported a recent issue with the third-party company that sends billing and invoice items to members. He has also been working to find unclaimed funds from lapsed and extinct chapters whose bank accounts are no longer used.

Limor provided an update of her SPJ travels to chapters since taking office, including Fort Worth and Albuquerque. She will travel to Salt Lake City soon and attend several regional conferences and a journalist's exchange to Japan in March.

Committee Reporters:

Limor reported updates from several SPJ committees:

Awards: Has decided to give one and only one New America Award starting in 2011 and proceeding each year.

Ethics: Working on marketing of ethics book and expansion of ethics section on SPJ.org.

FOI: Working on online training module and Access Across America grant request for 2011.

Freelance: Planning training module for website

International: Very active on the committee blog and is looking into potential for working with a journalism association in Uganda and potentially starting a chapter there. A discussion ensued about the many processes involved in such an arrangement and how U.S. and other countries' laws affect chapter relations with SPJ in the U.S.

LDF: Has received six requests for funding or joining amicus briefs since October.

STAFF REPORT

Executive Director Skeel reported that gifts to the SDX Foundation are up almost 10 percent over this time last year. The foundation will have about \$100,000 more this year than last year for grant-making purposes. The foundation finance committee will get a first draft of the foundation budget on February 16.

The annual budget process for SPJ has started, and staff department budgets are due January 19.

In October, SPJ missed budgeted revenue from membership of \$25,000 and further missed \$17,000 in November. This was due to the issue with the third party vendor not sending invoices to expiring members for renewal. After the situation was discovered by Headquarters, an explanation was sent along with invoices to those affected. This resulted in December membership revenue coming in \$17,000 over budget.

Smith asked if a previous effort funded by Howard Dubin to find lapsed members from several years back was successful. Skeel reported the goal was to get 75 people, and the end amount who re-joined was 110.

SPJ continues to find ways of partnering with other organizations. Most recently, the Freedom Forum asked to work with SPJ on an ethics summit in South Dakota in April. There are also "parachute training programs" in place with chapters working with the Online News Association.

Capital improvements are ongoing at Headquarters. The final big projects are interior painting and carpeting.

CHAPTER APPROVALS

Two chapters are seeking committee approval: Charlotte (pro) and DePaul University (campus)

Paperwork submitted by both groups was reviewed and discussed by the executive committee.

McCloskey asked if the Charlotte chapter was a renewal to revive an old chapter or a new provisional chapter. Skeel responded that it is a new provisional.

Upon proper motion and seconded by Lunsford and Albarado, respectively, the committee accepted the Charlotte chapter as a provisional professional SPJ chapter.

Upon proper motion and seconded by Lunsford and Ralston, respectively, the committee accepted the DePaul University chapter as a full campus SPJ chapter.

ENDORSEMENT OF NEWS LITERACY PROJECT

Skeel reported on his conversations with the McCormick Foundation on the topic of news literacy initiatives and the foundation's grant-making support of such programs.

Allan Miller has started the news literacy project and is asking for SPJ to join on the project as a supportive organization. There is no specific program or request of money SPJ is being asked to lend at this time.

Albarado suggested looking into Dan Gillmor as the author of a news literacy book.

Ralston suggested the education committee work on developing sample curriculum on news literacy.

Upon proper motion and seconded by Lunsford and Ensslin, respectively, the committee accepted Joe Skeel's recommendation to endorse the News Literacy Project as requested by Allan Miller.

COMMITTEE GRANT REQUESTS

The committee considered grant requests to endorse and approve before forwarding on for consideration by the Sigma Delta Chi Foundation.

Ethics Book Promotion: Smith presented a proposal on behalf of the Ethics Committee for marketing the forthcoming ethics book through a book tour to SPJ regional conferences and other events. The request is for travel costs and handling/mailing of books. It is for \$22,000.

McCloskey asked if some costs would be lowered due to Ethics Committee members already planning to attend regional conferences in their area. He asked if the request is for 2011 or 2012. Smith responded that it is for 2011 conferences and the expenses would be reimbursed if the grant is approved by the SDX Foundation.

Albarado said he is supportive, but is worried a little about the price tag associated with the request. Smith said he thinks \$22,000 is the high end and doubts expenses will go that high.

Ensslin suggested the national officers attending conference could present and take money from their already existing travel stipends.

Associated Executive Director Chris Vachon offered to rework the proposed budget based on the suggestion proposed.

Skeel added that in the end, this grant request may be unnecessary since the book project was really an SDX initiative, so marketing may be their financial responsibility.

Upon proper motion and seconded by Albarado and Ensslin, respectively, the committee voted to support the grant request.

Access Across America: Freedom of Information Committee Chairman David Cuillier submitted a request to fund regional Access Across America training through three or four regional trainers, based on the success of the 2010 AAA program.

McCloskey asked if the training would take place before the SDX Foundation approves the grant. President Limor said that since FOI is one of SPJ's overall core missions, the spirit of this program is one the committee needs to support now.

Upon proper motion and seconded by McCloskey and Albarado, respectively, the committee voted to support the grant request and recommend to the SDX Foundation.

National FOI Trainer: Freedom of Information Committee Chairman David Cuillier submitted an idea for a national FOI trainer. He is proposing a position funded by SPJ, the Sigma Delta Chi Foundation, American Society of News Editors and other possible organizations and foundations. There is no exact request, just a proposal to explore the concept of funding a position partially funded by SPJ. There is no specific dollar amount now, just an endorsement of an idea.

Upon proper motion and seconded by Ralston and Albarado, respectively, the committee voted to endorse the idea of a national FOI trainer.

Diversity: Skeel reported that he received a last-minute diversity grant from the Diversity Committee for funding 2012 Diversity Fellowships for the convention. The request is for the executive committee to endorse the forthcoming proposal that the Diversity Committee will present to the SDX Foundation in April.

Lunsford asked the amount, and Skeel said there was no specific line item in this request. Vachon said the approved amount for 2011 convention fellows is \$7,500.

The committee discussed that they would want the committee to include a definite amount.

Upon proper motion and seconded by Ralston and McCloskey, respectively, the committee voted to support taking the request to the SDX Foundation for \$8,000 and to include updates about projects and follow up metrics in the request.

CONVENTION 2011

Vachon and Lunsford provided an update on 2011 convention programming and planning. SPJ/RTDNA received about 80 program proposals through the Jan. 2, 2011 deadline and the programming committee will review them and make determinations in the coming weeks.

MARK OF EXCELLENCE AWARDS LUNCHEON

Skeel reported that staff has found the Mark of Excellence Luncheon to be financially unsound and impractical for the intended audience, but that SPJ should continue to recognize the national winners, just not with a formal luncheon at convention.

Smith asked if it affects the regional winners, and the answer is no. Regional winners would still be recognized at regional conferences.

Upon proper motion and seconded by McCloskey and Lunsford, respectively, the committee voted to eliminate the Mark of Excellence Awards Luncheon as it's been done in the past at the national convention.

REGION 3 DIRECTOR

Jenn Rowell has moved and will soon resign as the Region 3 Director. The executive committee will advertise the opening and encourage members to apply and have a full board conference call to vote. Skeel reported that whoever fills the spot will serve the rest of Rowell's term to the 2011 convention. A new regional director would then be elected during the convention.

SPRING CONFERENCES

The committee discussed spring conferences and assigned committee members to attend the 11 conferences.

SHIELD LAW

Ensslin asked to discuss renewed efforts for a federal shield law. Smith said SPJ and the media coalition need to continue pushing and not back down about what is needed.

Limor suggested an ad-hoc volunteer committee to focus solely on the shield law and relating to a public service and education campaign about its need.

CHAPTER ASSISTANCE

Ensslin put forth a proposal to appoint an ad-hoc committee to help chapters on assistance in meeting their minimum requirements to remain full chapters in good standing.

Limor suggested she appoint Ensslin as the de facto leader of a group of regional directors and the chapter doctors in helping chapters on assistance.

LDF REQUEST OF NICK OCHSNER

Skeel presented a proposal to grant the Legal Defense Fund request of Nick Ochsner in the amount of \$4,000 as previously requested.

Smith said he believes the full amount is a lot of money. Skeel suggested that the full amount is proper and would set a proper precedent that would help.

Smith motioned to grant \$2,000 above the already granted \$1,000 for a total of \$3,000. Ensslin seconded the motion.

Smith amended his motion to grant the full request of \$4,000 in addition to the already granted \$1,000 for a total of \$5,000, but with the stipulation that it be capped with no more in the future. Albarado seconded the motion.

McCloskey said he believed the board would be setting a bad precedent for the future to cap it.

Ralston said he dislikes that cap as well.

Upon proper motion and seconded by Smith and Albarado, respectively, the committee voted to grant \$4,000 to Nick Ochsner but stipulated no more for the future.

McCloskey and Ralston asked that the minutes reflect their objection in voting was to the cap, not the request. They support funding without a cap, now or in the future.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR PROGRAM

The U.S. Department of Labor has asked for SPJ's membership information for the purposes of doing a survey about workers in the journalism industry.

Lunsford said she understands people being uncomfortable with giving membership information to government organizations. However, she knows that as a journalist working with data, this sort of information is useful for those working with labor and industry statistics. Limor warned that members may not understand the value and would not like the idea of giving membership contact information, for whatever reason, however benign.

Ensslin said we could offer just to send a link to a survey directly to members through our own newsletter.

Upon proper motion and seconded by McCloskey and Albarado, respectively, the committee voted to respond to the DOL request by offering name, address and basic contact information for mailing a survey but to provide no demographic information or workplace employer information.

WORKING WITH INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Skeel discussed a meeting with Indiana University School of Journalism Dean Brad Hamm about SPJ and the journalism school partnering on future programs and events.

HELEN THOMAS AWARD

Smith motioned to remove Helen Thomas' name from the Lifetime Achievement Award. Albarado seconded the motion and stated it was solely for the purposes of opening discussion.

Discussion:

President Limor opened discussion by stating it is absolutely not true that she has been ramming through this point. She believes it is worthy of discussion, but has not advocated anything or pushed her opinion.

Albarado said he supports the idea that although the executive committee has the authority to decide this, it is best to be more inclusive and to leave it up to the board of directors, as several regional directors have requested. He suggested not waiting until the regularly scheduled April board meeting and rather having a conference call sooner with the full board.

Lunsford said she feels to do it here today robs people of their full voice and she supports a full board vote.

Smith said this has never been just a free speech issue. He absolutely supports her right to say what she wants, and SPJ believes that adamantly. Rather, he believes this is much larger, about wanting an SPJ award attributed to speech that, although protected, is divisive and grounded in conspiracy. He said to continue to honor her in this way would be a travesty.

Lunsford said she understands Smith's thoughts but believes the full board should decide.

Ensslin said he finds her remarks wrong, obnoxious and factually inaccurate. But he believes it's her political belief system and not hate speech. He said SPJ should not retreat from that basic First Amendment value and should not rename the award. He said he also agrees that it should go before the full board. He suggested if we hold this over to the full board, someone who knows her in SPJ should approach her and let her know the complexity and tell her that SPJ supported her after the first incident even when her employer did not.

Limor thanked everyone for their time on this and for the feedback from inside and outside SPJ. She reiterated that all along her interest was that of SPJ, not her ethnic or religious background. She said she supports sooner action than waiting for the board of directors meeting in April. She also reiterated that she still and absolutely supports Thomas' right to say what she wants to say.

Smith withdrew his original motion and Albarado withdrew his second.

Lunsford motioned to send the matter to the full board of directors to consider the issue on a conference to take place within 10 days. Albarado seconded the motion.

Discussion:

McCloskey suggested bringing another motion to simply retire the Helen Thomas Lifetime Achievement Award but to keep Thomas' name attached and that of the honorees since 2000.

Lunsford withdrew her motion. Albarado withdrew his second of the motion.

McCloskey made a motion to call a special meeting of the board of directors within 10 days, and that the Executive Committee would recommend that the board retire the Helen Thomas Award Lifetime Achievement Award. Albarado seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Ralston said this sounds like it would lessen the honor of the previous award winners.

Executive Director Skeel said the committee should be very careful to make sure to explain the rationale of the decision.

The motion carried 6-1 with Ralston against.

Ralston made a motion to attach an explanatory statement to the recommendation being sent to the board of directors to say: "While we support her free speech right to speak her opinion, we condemn her statements in December as offensive and inappropriate."

The motion carried 7-0.

MEETING ADJOURNED

The meeting was adjourned at 5:20 p.m. January 8, 2011.