

MINUTES
CLOSING BUSINESS SESSION OF THE
SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS
SEPT. 20, 2016
NEW ORLEANS, LA.

CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME

With President Paul Fletcher presiding, the Closing Business Session was called to order at 3:04 p.m. CT on Tuesday, Sept. 20, 2016, at the Sheraton New Orleans Hotel in New Orleans, La.

YEAR IN REVIEW

Fletcher gave a brief recap of what has happened over the past year, including “Fixing FOIA by 50”; Leading a delegation to the White House to speak with Press Secretary Josh Earnest about government transparency and the public information officer issue; Getting a letter to the editor published in the New York Times saying journalism groups will continue the fight for government transparency; Thinking more strategically about SPJ membership; and finally, looking at board governance.

HOW SPJ HELPS – MARK THOMASON

Fletcher introduced Mark Thomason, publisher of the Fannin Focus, a weekly newspaper in Blue Ridge, Georgia, who was arrested on felony charges stemming from his efforts to get information about a judge’s use of county money to pay legal fees of a contract court reporter who had sued him. Thomason gave a brief speech about what happened and how SPJ supported him.

EXPLANATION OF VOTING PROCEDURES

Fletcher introduced Parliamentarian Dave Carlson who explained voting procedures.

ELECTION RESULTS

Fletcher said this was the highest turnout for elections with 16 percent of the members voting (1,016 voters).

Results for election of members of the national board of directors are:

- President: Lynn Walsh.
- President-Elect: Rebecca Baker with 926 votes.
- Secretary-Treasurer: Alex Tarquinio with 919 votes.
- Director At Large – Rachel Wedding McClelland with 444 votes. Jason Parsley had 271 votes; Elle Toussie had 173 votes and Alex Veeneman had 69 votes. That means Rachel Wedding McClelland is the new Director At Large.
- Campus Adviser At Large: Leticia Lee Steffan received 522 votes. Chris Delboni had 395 votes, so Leticia Lee Steffan is the new Campus Adviser At Large.
- Campus Representatives: Keem Muhammad had 414 votes and Maggie Gottlieb received 387 votes. Emily Bloch received 282 votes, Jessica Hice 241 votes and Katherine

Rosenhammer received 84 votes. That makes Keem Muhammad and Maggie Gottlieb the two Student Representatives.

Fletcher also reported the Regional Director results. All positions were uncontested:

Region 1: Jane Primerano (142 votes)

Region 4: Patti Gallagher Newberry (77)

Region 5: Michele Day (88)

Region 7: Kerri Williams (32)

Region 8: Eddy Gallagher (65)

Region 9: Ed Otte (47)

Fletcher then invited the new board member to the front of the room where they were sworn in.

CONVENTION BYLAWS INFORMATION

Fletcher addressed proposed bylaw amendments. See **Appendix A** for bylaws proposals:

Article Four – The proposed change redefines our current Associate category by making the category available to anyone and removing a requirement that Associates be sponsored by current members of the Society. The changes reflect a desire to build a stronger base of people who support a free press and the public's right to know.

The proposed amendment, recommended by the board, for a revamped Associate category, would read:

- Persons who support the goals of the organization.
- High school students who have a demonstrated interest in journalism or whose serious interests or career plans are within the scope of the Society as defined in Article One, Section Two.

Motion to accept change to Article Four was made by Andy Schotz, DC Pro, and seconded by Amanda Ventura, Sun Valley Chapter.

In discussion, Lauren Bartlett voiced concern about erosion of membership and said she wants to amend the proposal to remove sponsorship, but keep the rest of the requirements for an associate. Second by Kathy Burns, DC Pro.

The proposed amendment was to return the following original language from the bylaws:

- Persons not eligible for membership in the Society who support the goals of the organization.

Colin DeVries, New York Pro, offered a friendly amendment to preserve the language that supporters are not eligible for membership. Bartlett accepted friendly amendment, Burns accepted.

Koretzky, Region 3 director, said he was confused between the original language and new language. Bartlett explained that the LA Pro Chapter believes anyone who is eligible to be a member should not be eligible to be a supporter for \$20. Koretzky said he would argue that the

original language proposed by Lynn Walsh was studied and it was determined that we wouldn't lose a lot of members to the \$20 supporter because you get no perks at that level. We have to support more good journalism and be able to say we support 15,000 journalists and their supporters. The past six years we've lost 1/3 of our membership and if you think we can make small changes and that will make our membership grow, that's not going to happen. DeVries said there is nothing in the bylaws that would limit them from networking, training, etc., -- the same things pro members have access to. He does not believe letting journalists join for \$20 is the answer and says there is nothing in the bylaws that would limit a \$20 supporter from networking, training, attend events, etc., the same as pros. He added that he is worried about potential conflicts of interest, for example, allowing public relations professionals to join at this rate and later weaken SPJ's work on the PIO issue, for example.

Kathy Burns, DC Pro, said Hazel Becker suggested making the associate rate \$20 rather than \$94. Koretzky said \$20 supporters would not be able to vote, he would welcome PR people. He added the average member doesn't care about voting. They want to be involved with a group of colleagues. Maureen Nevin Duffy, New Jersey Pro, said she is against the proposed amendment and thinks non-journalists should be charged a larger fee than journalists. Schotz said he thinks what the board wants to do and what Bartlett wants to do are basically the same thing -- trying to bring in members/supporters who are new, not necessarily working journalists, but support SPJ's mission. Bartlett clarified that her objection is to making it possible for journalists to become supporters rather than full members.

A voice vote on the amendment was taken first. It was decided to do a vote count. For Bartlett's amendment – 69. Against – 31. The amendment passed to restore the language: "Persons not eligible for membership in the Society who support the goals of the organization."

Article 4 of the bylaws will now read (with deletions in strike-thru italics, additions in caps):

ARTICLE FOUR

Membership

Section One. There shall be five categories of membership: Professional and Retired Professional (including Household), Institutional (including Collegiate Institutional), Student, Post Graduate, and Fellow. A separate category exists for *affiliates* SUPPORTERS of the Society, known as Associates.

Associate

Section Nine. Associates shall not vote, hold national or chapter office, be delegates to the national convention, nor be counted in determining the voting strength of a chapter as defined under Article Ten, Section Three.

Associates may be:

- Persons not eligible for membership in the Society who support the goals of the organization.
- High school students who have a demonstrated interest in journalism or whose serious interests or career plans are within the scope of the Society as defined in Article One, Section Two.
- ~~A person wishing to affiliate with the Society must be sponsored by a current member in good standing.~~

The underlying bylaws proposal, with Bartlett’s amendment, passed via voice vote.

Proposed bylaws amendments for Articles Five and Ten. See **Appendix A** for bylaws proposals:

- a. SPJ governs itself as a representative democracy, with all decisions coming from the annual convention. But the only delegates at convention are those that represent SPJ chapters. A task force worked to create a solution that would provide representation for everyone, including those not affiliated with chapters.
- b. The proposed amendment would create a system of regional delegates with votes assigned as they are to chapters. Regional delegates would be elected by unaffiliated members in their respective regions and represent those members on the convention floor.

Motion to approve amendment was made by Alex Tarquinio. Seconded by Andy Schotz.

Kathy Burns, DC Pro, said she is against this because there are 400 national members in DC and less than 180 belong to the local chapter. This is a way for people to bypass joining a chapter, which is the grassroots for activities for national. Tarquinio responded that 41 percent of current SPJ members are not represented on the convention floor because they do not have chapters. The group that studied this issue does not see this amendment taking away from chapters. This proposal would allow those who do not have a chapter near them to still be represented and possibly serve as delegates to convention. It would not change anything about how chapters are run or how unaffiliated members are treated, beyond giving them delegate status.

Jodi Gil, Connecticut Pro, said she is against this but with mixed feelings. She supports all members having a vote. She is concerned it could hurt local chapters because people might be less likely to join chapters. Bartlett, who is in support of this proposal, said surveys show that most people don’t belong to a chapter because there isn’t one near them. This proposal is in no way meant to detract from chapters. Koretzky said he doesn’t feel that members fleeing chapters is a valid reason not to pass this amendment. It is a valid reason to do better in our chapters, he said.

Mac McKerral said there are a lot of reasons SPJ has seen a decline in members, but one reason is that there are close to 60 journalism organizations in this country. Anything SPJ can do to open its doors to anyone who supports its mission is something we should do.

Ben Meyerson, Chicago Headline Club, supports the amendment and said it is a small thing to give to members. Can’t image it would affect membership on a large scale.

No changes to the amendments were made.

Fletcher called for a voice vote and the amendments passed.

CONVENTION RESOLUTIONS INFORMATION

Fletcher announced the next order of business: Consideration of the Resolutions Committee report prepared by Sonny Albarado, chair of the committee. Albarado explained the committee's report.

He recommended considering noncontroversial resolutions as a block and entertained a motion to vote on all except Nos. 1 and 7. Lauren Bartlett, LA Pro, made the motion. Michael Fitzgerald, Boston Pro, seconded.

Haley Harding, Ohio University, made a motion to remove No. 5 from the block. Tim Eigo, Valley of the Sun, seconded. It was pointed out that No. 6 mentions Trump by name and deals with access issues of his campaign. Albarado said that did not come up in committee, and that mentioning by name was an oversight. \

Resolutions nos. 1,5,6,7 pulled from block.

Upon proper motion and second, delegates approved all resolutions except Nos. 1,5,6,7. Brandon Ballenger said the last clause in Resolution 12 should say "filed" instead of "files." Motion passed.

Resolution 1: Renaming SPJ the Society for Professional Journalism -- Mac McKerral made motion to adopt. Amanda Ventura, Valley of the Sun Pro, seconded. Discussion: Haley Harding, Ohio University campus chapter, said the SPJ on her campus pulls in student journalists. Part of the pitch is that it is for professional journalists. Students don't want to "participate in journalism," they want to be practicing journalists. She said it would be more difficult to pitch to parents and students a membership in SPJ if the name was changed. She is against this resolution.

Irwin Gratz said a key procedural point is that the text of any bylaws change would have to be submitted to chapters 60 days before the convention can vote. The resolution can not take effect today. Passage would instruct bylaws committee to draft the language, make sure it is submitted to chapters late next summer, and the bylaws change would go to the board next year. If passed here, it would only be an expression of the will of the delegates at convention.

Lauren Bartlett, LA Pro, spoke against the resolution, saying a name change is not necessary.

Mac McKerral spoke in favor, saying there are a lot of moving parts happening with bylaws changes, trying to grow and strengthen members, etc. They are not independent of one another and changing the name might send a message that people respond to.

Danielle McLean, New England Pro Chapter, said she would want to know the financials of a name change and rebranding ourselves. What would this affect and what kind of money would it take for new branding. Koretzky responded that when RTDNA changed its name, it didn't cost much at all. It would involve changing the website, we could use things like the current stationery until its gone. McLean said there is a lot of branding out there among chapters, etc., and she would hope we would do our due diligence to get a cost estimate.

Haley Harding, Ohio Univeristy, said for smaller student chapters, the cost of changing branding would be difficult. Codes of Ethics, flyers, etc., would all need to be replaced and most smaller chapters can't afford to do that overnight.

Andy Schotz, DC Pro, said he has spoken out against this proposal in the past. His objection at the time was that a name change by itself doesn't change anything. But SPJ is showing that it is changing now, with the membership initiatives, etc., so he thinks a name change now makes sense. We are no longer an organization that is just journalists, he said. I agree with this idea this time because it is coming second instead of first, as in the past.

David Levitt, New Jersey Pro, said this comes up year and year and over the past 40 years, there has been a 20 percent reduction in journalists. Without SPJ, there is no organization for professional journalists. He thinks we should own who we are, and whether there are 6,000 or 60,000 journalists, we should be their society.

Kathryn Foxhall, DC Pro, said this will become a vehicle that will attract people who are not here to support the ideals of journalism, but want to try to influence journalism for their own purposes.

Kathy Burns, DC Pro, is strongly opposed to this resolution. SPJ has been a journalism organization for over 100 years. She thinks we would get into a mess of defining a newly named organizations. A name change is more than just changing a logo – it is changing the entire concept. When you change organizations' names, you change the culture. This would do very little to improve membership. We should think long and hard about changing the name of an organization with a more than 100-year reputation.

Maggie Gottlieb, University of Maryland student chapter, said it would change the dynamics of the organization. She recommends waiting to see how the inclusion of supporters impacts SPJ before changing the name.

Liz Enochs, Northern California Pro, thinks adding the supporter category is a great move in being more relevant and having a broader strategy. If we really want to consider rebranding, let's consider rebranding. Changing two letters doesn't do anything. Who are we? Who do we want to serve? Those are the types of questions we need to be addressing.

Koretzky said the resolution should come back as often as someone wants it to come back. Since it was first submitted three years ago, the debates keep getting longer and that's a good thing, he said. You don't have to be a journalist to learn journalism values. Journalism is a core function in government – the Fourth Estate – for a reason. There are so many journalism organizations now.

SPJ's name has changed twice in the past 40 years. The difference is, we don't have the luxury of being the only journalism organization anymore. With our membership number at 6700, we can do better at teaching people about journalism and that's why this proposal is here now, and why I hope it comes back next year if it does fail. If it comes back up next year and fails, he said he will stop bringing it up.

Michael Fitzgerald said he came prepared to vote against this resolution, but when he talks to people about why they should support SPJ, the things he sites aren't about being a journalist. He said he is going to change his vote and vote for the resolution.

Duffy, New Jersey Pro, spoke against the motion, saying journalists are independent. Rachel Hinton, president of the DePaul campus chapter, said the new name still would be a comfort as the organization isn't just about the people.

Mike Farrell "called the question" to end debate. Liz Enochs of California Pro seconded.

Irwin Gratz reiterated that a yes vote would set in motion the process to bring necessary bylaws language to next year's business meeting. The board would have to be ordered to take a vote and bylaws committee draft language that would be presented and voted on by the delegates next year. A yes vote today does not guarantee the name will change. It DOES guarantee a vote will be made next year, or it can be tabled next year.

Vote was taken. In favor – 44. Opposed – 57. Resolution did not pass.

Resolution 5: Opposing Mandatory Trigger Warnings

Mike McKerral motioned, Mike Farrell seconded.

The Resolutions Committee recommendation is in favor of opposing mandatory trigger warnings. Limit debate to six minutes.

Alisen Redmond Kennesaw State University spoke against motion – trigger warnings, are transparency about what content is. Just so students are prepared for the content they're seeing Haley Harding, Ohio State University was also opposed. Trigger warnings are good because everyone then knows what's coming, it is ethically correct to have trigger warnings. It's only a warning. I fight for free speech also, but I also support my friends who might find certain content disturbing or traumatic.

Tim Eigo, Valley of the Sun Pro, said this resolution is a hammer in search of a nail. Fifty percent of professors warn students about certain content, but they don't use the trigger warning term. We should not be a part of a national trend, even unintentionally.

Mac McKerral spoke in favor, saying the resolution is a produce of the education committee work. We knew going in what the pros and cons would be and we assure everyone the committee's discussion was not dismissive of anyone who has suffered any kind of trauma. We point back to the key word, "mandatory." Rules and regulations are growing. We understand course content can cause stress for some students. Hopefully students and their professors do

have discussions about what will be discussed in the class, regardless of what the content is, but the word “mandatory” is the real problem.

Ben Meyerson, Chicago Headline Club, said he would argue this strays from SPJ’s core mission as professional journalists.

Colin DeVries made motion that resolution be tabled. It was seconded by David Gordon of UW-Eau Claire Chapter. Motion carried and Resolution 5 was tabled.

Resolution 6: The Right to Report on Political Campaigns

Motion made by David Levitt of New Jersey Pro to pass resolution. Liz Enochs, CA Pro seconded.

David Levitt, New Jersey Pro, made a motion to add a friendly amendment to include what Trump said about “opening up libel laws.” Lauren Bartlett, LA Pro, seconded. Discussion included suggestion that the resolution would be more effective if it were as comprehensive as possible, including language that no candidates should not block access to any journalist.

Voice vote was taken and resolution passed.

Resolution 7: Opposing Censorship by Wealth

Mike Farrell, Blue Grass Chapter, made motion, Elizabeth Donald of St. Louis Pro second.

Stephanie Bluestein, LA Pro, voiced opposition to this resolution, saying the intention is good, but it is unfair to single out one owner and she was concerned about the tone of the resolution. Matt Hall, San Diego Pro, said he supported the resolution wholeheartedly. Andy Schotz, DC Pro, said he would support an amended version more and that SPJ has already spoken out by presenting an award to the Las Vegas Journal Review journalists who have been reporting the story. Kathy Burns spoke in support of a revised amendment. Robyn Sidersky asked if Andrew Seaman, ethics committee chair who is not a delegate, could speak. Request was granted. Seaman said the resolution singles out Sheldon Adelson because it is important to remember what he did. There are many libel cases against him, the ethics committee heard from journalists who are SPJ members who have been forced out of longtime careers because of the environment he created in their newsroom. For example, one reporter’s story about him was edited to include 12 inches of copy about Adelson’s defense. She asked for her byline to be removed from the story and was told no. If SPJ doesn’t stand up to this kind of behavior, who will? Seaman asked.

Vote was taken and resolution passed.

Albarado said as is tradition, he would read Resolutions 10 and 11 aloud -- thanking staff and president for their work over the past year.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Fletcher reminded delegates about the Legal Defense Fund live auction followed by the President’s Banquet later that evening where Lynn Walsh would be installed as new SPJ president. He also announced that because the associate bylaws change passed, Fletcher asked

delegates to take a post card on their way out, fill it out with names of people they think would want to join SPJ as supporters, and hand the cards to staff or mail them to SPJ HQ.

CLOSING

Upon proper motion and second, the meeting adjourned at 5:17 p.m. CT

APPENDIX A

ARTICLE FIVE

Governance

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Section Fifteen. The national headquarters annually shall determine the status of all SPJ chapters, with the assistance of the national board of directors. This process shall be completed in time for certification of delegates to the national convention. Chapters shall be notified of their status at least 60 days prior to the convention and shall have 30 days to bring themselves into active – good standing status.

Section Sixteen. As part of the process of certifying chapter membership for purposes of apportioning delegates to the national convention, the national headquarters shall determine whether each SPJ member in the region is or is not counted as a member of any SPJ chapter within or outside the region, and establish the total number of SPJ members living in each region who are not counted as members of any SPJ chapter within or outside the region.

Section Seventeen. Upon the decision to terminate any professional or campus chapter, whether by dissolution, disbandment, revocation pursuant to Section Thirteen of this Article, or otherwise, any remaining chapter funds shall be distributed to another adjoining active Society Chapter then in good standing, the Society, or the Sigma Delta Chi Foundation, as directed by the chapter's governing body, or, in the absence of action of the local board within 60 days of termination, the national board of directors.

ARTICLE TEN

Convention

Section One. The convention shall be the supreme legislative body of the organization. It shall be held at least biennially at a time and place designated by the board of directors.

Section Two. The convention shall be composed of delegates or representatives from each chapter, delegates chosen in each region by SPJ members residing in the region who are not counted among the members of any SPJ chapter within or outside the region, the national officers and the national board of directors.

Section Three. The Board of Directors shall establish a procedure and timetable for the selection of regional delegates. In the event that the number of potential delegates exceeds the number of convention votes assigned to the region, the national headquarters staff shall conduct a ballot among SPJ members living in each region not counted as members of any SPJ chapter within or outside the region to elect their delegates.

Section Four. In the convention, each professional and campus chapter considered as active in good standing shall have one vote for each 50 members or fraction thereof. Each region shall

have one vote for each 50 members or fraction thereof, who reside in the region and are not counted among the members of any SPJ chapter within or outside the region. Voting must be done by accredited delegates or their accredited alternate delegates present on the floor of the convention. Delegates cannot vote by proxy. National officers and members of the board of directors who are not delegates may not vote. In case of a tie, the presiding officer shall cast the deciding vote. Representatives of chapters who are not accredited as delegates may not vote.

Section Five. A convention quorum is present when delegates or alternates with authority to cast at least half of the delegate votes apportioned according to Article Ten, Section Three, are on the convention floor.

Section Six. All enactments of the convention shall become effective immediately unless otherwise specified.

Section Seven. Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised shall be the parliamentary authority for all matters of procedure not specifically covered by these bylaws.