

MINUTES
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS
DECEMBER 11, 2017
ZOOM CONFERENCE CALL

CALL TO ORDER

With President Rebecca Baker presiding, the meeting was called to order at 1:08 p.m. ET on Monday, Dec. 11, 2017 via Zoom conference.

ROLL CALL

In addition to Baker, the following were present: President-elect Alex Tarquinio; Secretary-treasurer Patti Gallagher Newberry; Immediate Past President Lynn Walsh; Vice President, Campus Chapter Affairs Sue Kopen Katcef; Director At-Large Lauren Bartlett; Regional Directors Jane Primerano, Andy Schotz, Michele Day, Joe Radske, Michael Koretzky, Matt Hall and Tom McKee.

Staff in attendance were Interim Executive Director Tara Puckey and Communications Strategist Jennifer Royer.

ROLE OF NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

The purpose of the call was to discuss the role of the Nominations Committee in SPJ elections. Baker explained that if anyone hadn't had the opportunity to have their say in the Slack discussion, this is their opportunity to share their thoughts on whether the Nominations Committee should make recommendations or endorsements of candidates.

Newberry explained that there are a lot of decisions still to made, but the task force laid out a road map that makes suggestions, including that the Nominations Committee would be comprised of seven members from different parts of the SPJ world, representing different populations of SPJ members. Beyond that, she said the task force was not very prescriptive and Nominations Committee will have to carry a lot of water and determine its own procedures. She said Walsh, as the presumed chair of the Nominations Committee, has a lot of latitude when it comes to how to identify potential board candidates. People can throw their own hats in, but the Nominations Committee will also be beating the bushes to find qualified potential candidates in their regions, newsrooms, etc.

Koretzky asked if everyone on this call wanted to run for board, and there weren't enough slots, if the Nominations Committee makes the recommendations, what would they be making those decisions based upon? How would the Nominations Committee choose who is qualified?

Walsh explained that the Nominations Committee would not be choosing one candidate over another, but if someone was simply not qualified, for example, does not practice professional, ethical journalism, or the committee feels they do not represent SPJ well, the committee would not include them on the ballot. It is not about the committee choosing Person B over Person C, but rather vetting each candidate to make sure they represent SPJ and journalism well.

Koretzky asked if qualified candidates would get a checkmark and unqualified candidates would not, or would those not qualified not even get on the ballot? Followed by Baker asking if the Nominations Committee should bar candidates from being on the ballot.

Bartlett said she thinks if someone doesn't meet basic qualifications they should not go on the ballot. Right now, she said, there is nothing to keep anyone off the ballot. This would be putting forth a compromise.

Tarquinio said her understanding from the conversations to-date is that even if the Nominations Committee doesn't think a candidate is qualified, anyone can self-nominate until the deadline. The question is, do they get the "seal of approval" from the committee? Anyone who declares after March would not be considered by the Nominations Committee. But there may be many qualified people who identify after March, so do we want to put them in that category of not being endorsed by the committee? There may be a lot of younger, more diverse candidates who declare after March. We don't want the committee to look like it is not supporting diversity.

Baker said the March deadline would be communicated via Leads, email blasts, the website, etc. It would be on the president and headquarters to let the membership know the deadline. If we have three months of heavy promotions to our membership and its ignored because people don't see it, do we want that person on the board who doesn't read Leads or who doesn't respect deadlines? Baker then asked if anyone who self-nominates is automatically on the ballot, or does the Nominations Committee act as a sieve?

Newberry said the task force believes the best people will rise to the top naturally. The group did not get into the weeds about the process by which that would happen. She offered her analysis of how it could work, but the task force did not offer any clarity on this point. There are basically three ways nominees come forward: 1. People who are already involved and invested. 2. People identified by the Nominations Committee. 3. People who are not either of those and for whatever reason, throw their hat into the ring.

In addition, Newberry said she has come to the opinion that "we are going to do just fine without the Nominations Committee endorsing people." She said the main goal is finding people who can help us create a strategic plan, make sure all pockets of SPJ are looped in, and help us make big decisions, act quickly – all the advantages of a smaller board. She does not believe the Nominations Committee should be able to give a "thumbs up or thumbs down" and elections should be open to all who meet the already established criteria. Candidates will have to put their ideas before voting members and members will decide. Newberry said she believes the process will work just fine and that we don't need a system for endorsing.

Baker said there can still be candidate bios and their answers to questions, as happens now. She said the Nominations Committee will have a big enough task looking for candidates in places we wouldn't have normally looked without having to rank them or endorse them. She believes the Committee will find visionary candidates who have not come forward before and the "cream will rise to the top."

Katcef commented on Tarquinio's thoughts concerning leaving an open deadline. This is a business that is deadline driven. She said you can make every effort to get the word out and eventually you must fish or cut bait. A deadline is necessary. She agrees that an endorsement from the Nominations Committee is not necessary, but she would like there to be a simple point for each criterion a candidate meets. She thinks vetting would be good, without any type of official endorsement.

Schotz referred to his Slack post and suggested keeping in mind that SPJ's trend in recent years is to spread power out to all members and take it away from smaller groups. Giving the Nominations Committee more power goes in the opposite direction. Unlike other non-profits, SPJ doesn't have to operate as transparently as it does, but it believes in being open and transparent, so by that standard, he thinks we need to keep government ideas of how to run an election in mind. He thinks it is important for SPJ to be neutral and do nothing to influence how candidates are presented in an election.

Koretzky called for a vote.

Schotz made a motion to approve the draft that was posted in Slack that reflects that the Nominations Committee forms to recruit and solicit nominations; that the principles already exist about the types of candidates we want; and that those candidates are placed on the ballot along with any who self-nominate; and SPJ will inform voters with all information available on each candidate so voters can make informed decisions.

Tarquinio seconded.

Baker reiterated that once the Nominations Committee finds candidates meet minimum qualifications, they are on the ballot.

Hall said (via chat) that he agrees with Newberry and Baker and with Schotz's overarching points. He is against a point system and wants to shy away from recommendations or a stamp of approval. He likes the focus Schotz expressed via Slack on A) recruiting excellent candidates and B) putting those candidates and their views in front of the membership via Q&As, social media and a group discussion at the Excellence in Journalism conference. He suggested considering rebranding/renaming the committee as a recruitment committee rather than a nominations committee. He wonders if that name would make it clear that it is not making endorsements but rather seeking a wide range of potential candidates.

After short discussion, Schotz amended the motion to include adopting a set of guidelines that direct the nominations committee, a body that finds and recruits candidates, based on principles SPJ supports, but takes no other actions to indicate preference of certain candidates over others.

Tarquinio seconded.

Following proper motion and second, the board voted to approve, 10 to 3. Those voting for the proposal were: Baker, Tarquinio, Schotz, Walsh, Newberry, McKee, Primerano, Koretzky, Hall and Day.

Those voting against the proposal were: Bartlett, Radske and Kopen Katcef.

ADJOURNMENT

Under proper motion by Newberry and second by Tarquinio, the meeting was adjourned at 1:52 p.m. ET Monday, Dec. 11, 2017.