



MEETING MINUTES
SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

DATE: AUGUST 21, 2021

TIME: NOON EDT

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

SPJ National President Matthew T. Hall called the meeting to order at 12:01 p.m. EDT in the name of all the journalists who are and were in Afghanistan. He thanked them for their service and reporting of what is going on in that part of the world.

ROLL CALL

Secretary-Treasurer Ivette Davila-Richards called roll. Those present were: Hall; Davila-Richards; Rebecca Aguilar; Lauren Bartlett; Jerry McCormick; Rafael Olmeda; Claire Regan; Bey-Ling Sha; Yvette Walker. SPJ headquarters staff present were John Shertzer, executive director; Jennifer Royer, director of communications and marketing; and Caroline Escobar, manager of membership and chapters.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Walker made a motion to approve the minutes from the June 26, 2021, meeting. Davila-Richards seconded. Motion passed. Olmeda abstained because he was not present at that meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Member Israel Balderas referenced the June meeting minutes and the 4-4 vote to not put forth bylaws changes to the convention floor. He said he would like to know more about who voted from the 10 chapters that voted to move the bylaws changes to the convention floor. He urged more transparency and accountability to for the next bylaws committee and board of directors so there isn't any obscurity and things getting lost in translation.

Hall reiterated that his cell phone number has been available and he shared it again for anyone who wants to speak to him about the process and provision in bylaws. Member Andy Schotz said the most chapters have provisions in their own bylaws to discuss urgent issues quickly and take any needed action quickly. Bylaws Committee Chair Bob Becker said the bylaws are clear and this provision has been used once before.

Balderas said his concern is about issues of ethics and transparency. He said as journalists we hold those in power accountable and we need to have openness as well and we need to insert more accountability into the bylaws process.

Hall added that 18 chapters voted and sent letters which are posted publicly on the spj website.

Bartlett added that the process, while not frequently used, is well established, and clarified it was Schotz who pursued it, not Hall. She was very offended by the finger pointing, name calling and questioning of integrity of those in chapters who voted and submitted letters. She said we need to start treating people with respect again within this organization. Things smoothed out when Patricia Gallagher Newberry was president, Bartlett said, but she has seen SPJ go back down that hole and she would like to see that stop now. We should not treat people as though they are lying until they prove they are telling the truth, she said.

Aguilar said she pursues everything as a journalist and she is one of the people who asked for proof from chapters. She said everything we do should be on the record so it is documented if in the future someone asks questions. It's not a question about integrity or being disrespectful, she said, but we aren't doing diligent work if we can't document it.

Conversation shifted to SPJ21 and the board's vote earlier for it to be a hybrid conference. Bartlett said voting to make the conference hybrid was the responsible and correct way to do it. Hall said he thinks the entire board and process is vindicated. The decision that was made was made at exactly the right time. Any other time would have been premature, he said. Now that the conference is all virtual, there is not penalty and the safety of members has always been a priority.

Hall added that we should not act skeptically toward our chapters and we should stand up for our chapter leaders and the work they do. Regarding the bylaws change, he said chapters looked at the situation at hand and made a decision for their boards in a short timetable. If bylaws need to change to be made clearer, let's do that, he said. Hall said he's available to discuss anything with anyone, as he has been all year and that bylaws amendments are the purview of our members.

NEW CHAPTER BUILDING

Caroline Escobar, manager of membership and chapters, presented five new campus chapters for charter: Loyola Marymount; Stoneybrook; University of Central Florida; University of Laverne and University of Missouri. Escobar said one free student membership is being offered to new campus chapters to possibly help them identify a president or secretary-treasurer, etc. She thanked the Campus Chapter Task Force for its work. Bartlett moved to charter the five new campus chapters. Sha seconded. Motion passed.

SPJ21 DISCUSSION

Shertzer said there are currently 300+ registered for the virtual conference. The programming was tweaked a bit to make it easier for virtual programming. He said speakers, presenters and panelists have done a nice job of making a pivot to virtual. Staff reviewed the Chime Live platform that will be used for the event to allow attendees to chat with each other, network, view sessions, etc. There is a nice group of exhibitors in place to interact with participants and the event has some great sponsors as well. The only contract still being negotiated is that with the riverboat.

Hall said he appreciates staff pulling off the heavy lifting of making the switch to all virtual. He noted that the registration will likely grow during the last couple weeks like it did last year. He encouraged everyone to register and promote the event.

2023 CONVENTION DISCUSSION

Shertzer reminded everyone that the CMA-ACP conference that year is a Monday-Thursday event and we could do a conference on our own if we do not want to have conference during the week. Hall said he does not think a conference over weekdays and over Halloween is a good idea. He thinks it is a nonstarter for journalists and academics. Bartlett said historically there have been times when we've done a conference Monday through Wednesday so that would not automatically rule it out. She is concerned about Halloween and how a conference during that time would impact members with their families. Any other week, she said we should strongly consider partnering with these groups because one of the strategic plan's pillars is increasing student members. Hall also expressed enthusiasm for a continued partnership with CMA and ACP even if the joint conference in 2023 does not happen. Shertzer said he will pursue a partnership in 2024 and beyond.

FIRST AMENDMENT ADVOCACY REPORT

Shertzer referred to the report in the board folder and said there are basically three ways to go with advocacy: Education, lobbying or the status quo. Hall said essentially what we do now is a mixture of all three. He said we are in a unique position in American history because of declining trust in media and because so many people actively vilify journalists. He said it is a good conversation to have. It is an important position but it is a lot of money and this conversation will help inform future boards in their decision to make the investment or continue to do it ad hoc.

Bartlett said she would like to ask for a pathway No. 4, which would formalize moving forward with things that make SPJ more active but do not go to the extent of pathway No. 2. She explained that board members used to go to the Hill twice a year with the executive director and we could do that again and involve the FOI Committee or FOI Community we have been talking about. It could include volunteer involvement with the support of the staff. She said rebuilding what is already there may be the next logical step.

Aguilar said she thinks we need someone who works exclusively on advocacy who is paid for keeping up-to-date on what is happening in Washington, D.C., and is a defender of journalism. This person could keep the SPJ president informed, keep chapters informed, appear before Senate committees, etc. She said we need a person to focus on this 100% and they could bring in committees to help.

Regan pointed out efforts at the state level and encouraged everyone to see what is done in New York.

Olmeda said he agrees that we need someone to articulate how SPJ defends journalism and that it is a worthwhile investment. He envisions this person as not just a lobbyist, but a coordinator of a large scale effort to defend journalism.

Walker said she like's the idea working at the state level as another way to get the work done.

Sha said she supports having a full-time person but encourages setting up parameters for the position so it is as effective as possible. Being a leader of an advocacy effort is not the same as being an organizer and trainer of an advocacy effort, she said, adding that she supports a full-time paid position dedicated to advocacy, but future boards need to be very thoughtful about putting parameters around it.

Bartlett agreed about parameters and added that it is important to identify a source for funding.

COMMITTEE AND COMMUNITY REPORTS

Brief remarks were given by Aguilar, Walker and Schotz. All reports that were submitted can be found in the board folder.

Hall noted upcoming training for delegates and a candidate forum for members to ask candidates questions.

ADJOURNMENT

Bartlett made a motion to adjourn. Aguilar seconded. Motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 1:41 p.m. EDT.