

National Press Club
General Membership Meeting
Oct. 10, 2014

Meeting called to order at 12:18 p.m.

President Myron Belkind opens the meeting, begins President's Report.

President Belkind commented on column written for the Washington Post by Dana Milbank, former member & journalist, on events at the club, saying:

We respect Dana's position as a columnist. We are pleased to see him when he is here visiting the Club and sometimes writing about it.

Firstly, the National Press Club in 2014 is strong professionally and financially and our membership has been stabilized at a little more than 3,000, despite the cataclysmic upheaval in our industry over the past two decades.

Secondly, please judge us by our programs, such as our newsmakers and luncheons and book events and press freedom events. We do so many of these, and they are so special. Our members and staff put them on and we are constantly working to improve them and do more of them. They are our gift, not just to members, but to the Washington press corps., who cover them, to CSPAN, which broadcasts them, and to the billions of people across the country and around the globe who view them and appreciate them. Every single one is on the record. One of the most important things we do is establish a record for our fellow journalists by inviting government officials and others to come visit and take

questions. We have been doing this for years, decades. People come from other countries to ask us to teach them how to do it. It is our honor to do so.

As you know, to run a facility like this with broadcast and food and staff requires more resources than our membership dues produce. Like many other organizations, the Press Club relies on revenue from events with room rentals to cover our costs and keep us going. This is something the Club has done since 1927. Many of the people who pay for rooms are our own members.

Just curious, please raise your hand if you have rented a room here or if you have attended an event where a member has rented a room. Wow -- I was wondering if I should ask the question, but I think we have over 90 percent, without exaggeration.

When an organization rents a room for a news conference or meeting or dinner, the Press Club does not tell them what to say or how to organize their event, or what the ground rules should be that they set out to their invitees.

That was the case this week with the event that Dana Milbank attended. When the event is ours, the ground rules are ours. When the event is organized by the Republican National Committee or the Democratic National Committee, they establish the ground rules. It is rare for events here to be off the record. Rare, but it does happen.

Every journalist has been invited to an event that is off the record. In the case of this event, we believe they mistakenly sent out a news release without

specifying the event was off the record. We did not know that. It was not our mistake to have made.

We are sorry that Mr. Milbank was invited to an event via the Reuters daybook without knowing that it was off the record. We learned of this when he told us. To repeat, it was not a news conference, it was a meeting where attendees were paying fees to attend these briefings. The press release does not say it is off the record, it does not say anything about coverage. This could have been done better by the organization; we had no role in that.

Nevertheless, I'm asking the board of governors to develop a committee to look at our practices and see what can be done in this area. For example, it's possible that organizations seek permission in advance to have an off-the-record session at the National Press Club and we'll report back by our general meeting in January. If there are changes, we will report those to you.

The National Press Club has developed a robust and sustainable business model for the future while maintaining its integrity, values and mission. We will continue to do so despite the challenges we face in the media landscape of 2014, along with other media organizations. I will post a President's Blog with some of these points, please feel free to pass it on including via Twitter and Facebook.

Some of the great things that the NPC has done since our last general membership meeting in May. The following demonstrate some of the very best that the National Press Club and only the National Press Club

can do:

Firstly, let me that you back to the annual Journalism awards dinner on July 30. It's an awards program that raises money for the National Press Club and the Journalism Institute, funds for scholarships including the scholarship awarded to Jose Valle.

Chairman Andrea Snyder and I gave Jose the breaking news that he'd won the scholarship of up to \$10,000 over four years when we phoned in live at 8 in the morning to the journalism class at a high school in Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina. On July 30, I was pleased to call on Jose to speak to us. I am pleased to ask you to view what many consider as the highlight of that evening.

<<Plays clip from dinner of Jose Valle addressing attendees>> Comments include: Jose announcing he's an undocumented immigrant, a fact that he's only shared with a few very close people. That secret pushed him to work hard but hurt him, too. Although he was accepted into a number of exclusive journalism programs, North Carolina law requires undocumented students to pay out-of-state tuition. He can't attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill because of finances. But he overcame the disappointment and with the help of the National Press Club and some special people, will attend Durham Tech outside Chapel Hill (loud applause) which will give him the opportunity to volunteer in the Chapel Hill news studio, for which he is grateful.

General Membership Meeting attendees applaud.

President Belkind: It still resonates. I'd like to

acknowledge Andrea Snyder (Edney), chair of the Scholarship Committee, and Will Lester, chair of the Awards Committee for four years, who made a major innovation this year in having the awards submitted for the first time online.

Secondly, let me take you back to the Sept. 13 awards dinner honoring this year's recipient, Charlie Rose, who is a master interviewer. The dinner is the biggest fundraiser for the journalism institute, and this year it raised more funds than ever before for scholarships. <<Plays clip broadcast on CBS in the morning, Gayle King and Norah O'Donnell comments on Fourth Estate award dinner>>

President Belkind acknowledges Fourth Estate Dinner Committee co-chairs Lori Russo and Jodi Schneider for their hard work in putting the dinner together, as well the Journalism Institute's Julie School and Nicole Hoffman.

Thirdly, two weeks ago today, Abdullah Elshamy, an Al-Jazeera journalist released from weeks in prison after a hunger strike, came to the National Press Club to express his thanks to the Freedom of the Press Committee for their efforts on behalf of the journalists imprisoned in Egypt, some of whom are still imprisoned. <<Plays clip of Elshamy saying statements made a difference>>

President Belkind commends John Donnelly and his colleagues on the Freedom of the Press Committee for the work they do, sometimes past midnight and at dawn.

Finally, please view photos of speakers we've had at

the National Press Club in recent months. Includes: Donald Trump, three African leaders (Presidents of Republic of Congo, South Africa and Burkina Faso). President Belkind commends Speakers Committee Chairman Jerry Zremski and Vice-Chair Donna Leinwand Leger.

Finally, sadly, I would like to pay tribute to Marilou Donahue, a long-time member and a friend to so many. She helped organize so many newsmakers, including a luncheon featuring Donald Trump and Dr. Ben Carson. <<Moment of silence to recognize this extraordinary and talented person.>> Thank you.

Secretary Andrea Snyder (Edney) moves for approval of the May 9 General Membership Meeting minutes. Seconded, approved.

Membership Secretary Marc Wojno presents Membership Report. Thanks staff members Melinda Cooke, Allyson Cannon, Sarahanne Driggs, Ruth Mohamed for their efforts to help expand membership, Executive Director Bill McCarren for his input.

The membership numbers as of Aug. 31 stand at 3,173 total, with 233 applications so far this year. Membership is down 53 members from the beginning of the year, we are up year-to-date in terms of overall and paying members. The outlook for the year is quite positive. We have 45 applications to be presented to the board later this month for approval.

This year we've added members from prestigious organizations, both journalists and communicators, for example, the executive editor of National Public Radio, the president of the Poynter Institute, the DC

correspondent of CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corp.), a documentary producer for Al-Jazeera, the U.S. bureau chief for El Economista, the executive vice president of Univision, the spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the executive director of the Congressional Hispanic Leadership Institute, president of the Franklin Center for Government and Integrity.

Membership Secretary Wojno presents update on the 'Member-Get-a-Member' campaign, thanks members for helping recruit members. Winners will be announced at the January 2015 General Membership Meeting. Person to recruit the most members will win a \$500 National Press Club gift card, second place will win \$200, third place is \$100.

National Press Club has expanded its number of reciprocal clubs by three since last meeting. Have 43 reciprocal clubs in the U.S and 37 throughout the world. Have added the University Club of Lansing, Michigan; the Faisalabad Press Club in Faisalabad, Pakistan; the International Press Club of Prague, Czech Republic. In terms of new benefits, we have a relationship with Zipcar, 50 percent off of annual membership. Also with Uber: NPC members can get a free ride or a \$20 credit when they sign up as a new client and use the code NATIONALPRESS. There will be cards at the front desk and more information at <http://www.press.org>. We can always take questions at member@press.org, but I'm happy to answer any questions now.

Member: How many new college members did we get?

Membership Secretary Wojno: I think we have approved between 20 and 30 student members this year. That's pretty typical on an annual basis.

Member: One of the most exciting programs is the student internship program. We've got three of them right here. In the last two weeks, they've all been published in major newspapers with op-eds. We're very excited about what the club offers. I'd encourage all of the members who have firms or media outlets to encourage their interns to become student members of the National Press Club.

Treasurer Thomas Burr presents his report on National Press Club's financial position. The National Press Club is on solid financial footing. We are building reserves and looking forward to a bright future. This has been somewhat of a roller-coaster year with great positives and tough negatives.

On the good side, the Press Club in June had best revenue ever with more than \$1.4 million in revenue, we'd never topped that number before. Our profit was more than \$380,000 that month. On the downside, in July, we had a nearly \$180,000 loss. August is always biggest money-loser, with Congress out of session and people on vacation. In August, we had less of a loss than we had budgeted. For September, we had revenue of nearly \$2 million, and profit of \$200,000.

On the bright side, the business overall is profitable, with a profit of about \$300,000, and, if things go well, we are on target to possibly hit our budget goal for the year.

We have been aggressively paying down our debt. Can I get a round of applause for Executive Director Bill McCarren and Controller/Budget Manager Georgetta George? <<Applause>> In tough times, it's really these guys who made this happen.

Having a successful business side has helped us continue our mission of being the world's leading professional organization for journalists. We've had 21 luncheons this year, we have more scheduled. We've had three heads of state. We also have to note that costs rise. We're expecting costs to rise about 6 percent this year, including payroll, cost of food.

The reason I'm bringing this up is the Board of Governors and Dues Committee have unanimously approved a \$1/mth dues increase for most categories. That doesn't include the student, spouse, retired categories. For the rest of us, it's \$1 a month, \$12 a year. It's not much, but it does help us. It's about a 2 percent raise on dues versus about a 6 percent raise in costs for the business.

Treasurer Burr moves for dues increase of \$1 a month for categories excluding the spouse, student, intern and retired member categories.

Member Joel Whittaker seconds the motion. Treasurer Burr asks if there is any discussion.

Member asks if all members are allowed to vote.

Treasurer Burr responds that it's a budget matter, all members are allowed to vote.

Approved unanimously.

President Belkind thanks the membership for the unanimous approval for 2015 dues increase, asks if there is any old business. No old business. Any new business?

Member Jonathan Salant: Myron, I appreciate your president's report at the beginning and the explanation of what went on. What bothers me is that we had two major news organizations, the Washington Post and Politico, representatives of which the National Press Club is quick to put on its panels and give prestigious positions to at its events, wrote stories that are totally inaccurate.

The Press Club was silent for 24 hours, while some prestigious members -- Doug Turner, Heather Hope, who was on the board when I first got active in the Club, Andrew Schneider -- were posting on Facebook and bemoaning the National Press Club. I know that John Donnelly and John Hughes and I were on Twitter and Facebook and very active in responding, Alison Fitzgerald responded to Politico. But we had two of the most prestigious news organizations in Washington saying that the National Press Club censored and excluded the Club from activities that it was sponsoring. And the Press Club was silent on that.

The Club took a big hit in terms of reputation and I'm really disappointed that some of us who cared about the Club had to take this step and we shouldn't have when the Club allowed this to happen.

The only reason there's an issue is because someone wrote an inaccurate story. Didn't call people for comment, didn't check out the facts, and now we're

talking about this stuff and the only reason it's an issue is because one of the biggest papers ran a story full of inaccuracies. That's not journalism.

I think we ought to be doing something about it and the statement should say, ``Wait a second, folks, this is wrong.'' Not having a meeting and saying Reuters wrote something, but that the Washington Post and Politico were wrong. And I really wish we'd do something like that.

President Belkind: Thank you, Jonathan. <<Applause>> Jonathan, just let me respond that we had the current vice president and several past presidents out there on Facebook and Twitter. We had a meeting about this and I wanted to make a substantive statement today to the General Membership Meeting. I heard the word ``censor,' ' I don't think we tried to censor anything. I think we responded responsibly through today's meeting and I'm very grateful to the current vice president and the past presidents; they advised me they would be doing that yesterday.

Member Lou Priebe: Welcome to the world of PR. <<Laughter>> I think we owe Dana Milbank thanks because he gave you the occasion to say some of the things that you just said and to clarify his comment. With that caveat, I think it's wonderful that you're taking the approach to possibly include that in our contracts with those outside groups. I've hired or retained as many rooms as anyone else. Out in Oklahoma, we would say, ``that's our deed to the ranch'' and we can do whatever we want to out there. And if they want to keep people out of their meetings, why the heck they come to the National Press Club, I will never know. But I do hope

that Dana Milbank will be made aware of your comments which very much put things into perspective and clarified them, with the request that he correct the misimpression that he may have left in the minds of some misinformed people. It is incumbent on him to be accurate in reporting on the affairs of the National Press Club and he wasn't.

President Belkind: Thank you, Lou.

Member: What about letters to the washingtonpost.com, let's do a letter, maybe you could do a letter.

President Belkind: As soon as I get out of this meeting, I will post to the President's Blog, and we will Tweet that. I know we will get that out there. I am grateful again to the current Vice President John Hughes and the former presidents for doing that. We had a meeting and agreed this was the right way to do it. I respect those like Jonathan, who disagree.

Member Connie Lawn: Thank you to you Myron and the board for all their hard work. Also, I have heard an ugly rumor that the building is up for sale. Is that true? Could we as the members all put in shares to buy the building?

President Belkind: I think we're in a good financial state, but I don't think we're in a good enough financial state to buy the building. However, we do have a long-term rental agreement and any new owner would have to respect that.

Member Connie Lawn: How long-term?

Treasurer Tommy Burr: Until about 2070.

Executive Director Bill McCarren: We have a lease until 2078. We won't be there that long.

Member Will Lester: Myron, thank you for your statement. I agree that the people who rent these rooms should be able to do whatever they want, but I wonder if there's a chance that if we see a similar situation, if we could go on a case-by-case basis, when there's something that could generate news of interest.

President Belkind: I think that's a good suggestion. This committee that I've appointed will deal with this very promptly.

Member Aileen Schlef: I do a lot of informal marketing to get people to come to the Club, especially in my diversity work. Very often, no matter what happens at the Club, people seem to think that it's a National Press Club event. I think we have to refine our brand a little bit, because that's a protection we have to take.

President Belkind: Thank you.

Member Mike Soraghan: I would just encourage everyone not to overreact. News doesn't always happen in an orderly way. If you're going to be the place where news happens, it happens the way it happens.

Member Wes Pippert: I think that in the future, anybody that rents space from the National Press Club should understand that as far as possible all events are open to the press. That's a principle of the National Press

Club, that's what we believe in. Even though it may be a private organization, the fact that it's held here, it bears our thumbprint. So the basic principle is that if you rent rooms here, it's open to the press.

President Belkind: Thank you, Wes.

Member Jan Du Plain: Myron, thank you for leading such a good meeting. On the PR side, all publicity is good publicity. It is an opportunity for us to talk about what he said was the decline of the National Press Club. And I would hate to bring up the Washington Post <<Laughter>>. And I would hate to talk about subscriptions... But we're not going to go that way. Myron, this really is a great opportunity. He will be invited to this next event that I'm sure you're going to make mention of. We got headlines and so we take it and we'll work with it.

President Belkind: We do our best to turn a negative into a positive and I assure you that's what we're working on. The event that Jan mentioned, Jan Du Plain is organizing an international cultural evening that builds on the international cultural inaugural. That'll be the evening of Nov. 19. Thank you, Jan for all that you're doing to organize that.

President Belkind: Are there any other questions or comments? <<None>> It's exactly 1 p.m. I'd like to set the date of the next annual membership meeting for Friday, Jan. 16, the third Friday of January, when I'll give my final report as president and we'll turn the gavel over to the next president. The elections are Dec. 12. We are adjourned.