

MINUTES OF THE OCT. 12, 2004, NPC BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEETING
Sylvia Smith, Secretary

Chairman John Donnelly called the meeting to order at 6:45 p.m. Present were President Sheila Cherry, Vice President Rick Dunham, Secretary Sylvia Smith, Membership Secretary Jerry Zremski (by speakerphone), Governors Gayela Bynum, John Gallagher, Donna Leinwand and General Manager John Bloom. Absent were Treasurer Jonathan Salant and Governors Jerry Bastarache, Jack Cushman, Mark Hamrick and Alison Bethel. Also in attendance were members Clayton Boyce, Forums Chairman Rod Kuckro and Tom Gallagher.

Donnelly said the meeting was called to discuss a single subject and recognized Smith, who moved that the National Press Club shall co-sponsor with the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association an Oct. 14 forum on the politics of gay marriage that meets NPC standards for fairness and inclusiveness. Zremski seconded. Donnelly said he would go around the table once and ask each person to express his or her views.

Smith said the views of Cherry and Bethel are clear and have been articulated well in email correspondence. She said she appreciate that they stuck by their guns, but she disagrees. She said the issue is timely because it is a factor in the elections, and collaboration with other journalism groups strengthens our organization, ourselves and our fellow journalists.

Dunham said he respects the deeply held views of Cherry, but he respectfully disagree with her.

He said he respects the concerns about communications problems expressed by Chairman Kuckro and hopes we can resolve that, in the future, we will have better communication among our partners, our committees, our Board, and our staff.

He said he also respects the concerns about email votes expressed by former President Boyce and hopes the board either change the bylaws to conform with Board practices since the advent of email, or makes sure our practices in the future conform to the bylaws.

He said, however, that such concerns should not distract us from the merits of the issue at hand. He said he strongly supports doing everything we can as a Board to ensure that this upcoming Forum is held as a co-sponsored event, as scheduled.

He said he strongly supports building partnerships with other journalism organizations to provide more benefits for our members, improved professional programs at our Club, and an opportunity for non-Club members from other journalism organizations to see the high-quality professional offerings of our Club.

Dunham also said he regrets that some of the discussion over these past few days has been uncivil. He said he hopes the board members can put this behind us and work together to provide more valuable professional development programs for the NPC.

John Gallagher said he agreed with Dunham except for a few things. He said that since he originally voted for the program, he has developed concerns about going forward. He said he has become aware of the controversy over what is an advocacy group, what constitutes co-sponsorship, collaboration or working together, whether the NPC has co-sponsored events in the past.

Zremski said the more that the NPC co-sponsors events with legitimate groups, the better off the Club is. He said the Board can learn from this experience, can revisit its rules about email voting and can establish rules for co-sponsoring events. Those things aside, he said, co-sponsoring the event would be good for NPC members.

Kuckro said having a co-sponsorship policy is important. He said he learned earlier in the day that one of the speakers had dropped out but that he would be replaced. He said he spent much of the time this year turning down people who wanted to have NPC forums because essentially they wanted a room for free and wanted to associate themselves with the NPC's good name.

Boyce, Kuckro, Zremski and Cherry spent some time talking about who dropped out and what would be done about replacing him. Donnelly reminded the group that there was a motion on the floor. Boyce said he objected to the suggestion that the discussion was not relevant because without a speaker opposing gay marriage, the panel would not be fair and balanced. Donnelly reminded the board and the other attendees that the motion requires the event to meet NPC standards for fairness.

Boyce said he has been dismayed at the way the Board has handled the situation. He said the Board has been insulting and has refused to listen to members' views. He said no one ever suggested the event should not be held; he said the issue was over co-sponsorship with an outside group. He said then, after Zremski assured him that NLGJA was not an advocacy group, he said fine, but that the Board should have a proper vote because the email vote was not. He said Smith told people he (Boyce) was at the general membership meeting "to push this through." He said his email said a member of the Board should make the motion. He said the Board brought up the issue without it being on the agenda and that previous Boards have seen this as an abuse of power and allowed people to request that an issue be delayed one meeting. He said the Board did not look at the NLGJA web site or hear from the Forums Committee chairman and voted based on what two Board members said about the NLGJA. When Cherry took her action to prevent the co-sponsored event, he said, the Board rushed into an email vote, which Boyce called improper. Boyce said Kuckro's objections and the objections of a group of ex-presidents did not reach the Board until after the email vote. He said that when he pointed out that the email vote was illegal, there were accusations that he was wrong and that he had some other motivation. He said members of the Board "bounced around words like

homophobic against me and Rod.” He said Leinwand was part of the conversation where that happened. He said those remarks were “totally baseless and slanderous to other members of the Club.” He said all he was trying to do was get a proper vote so the Board could defend it, and so that nobody could sue. He said Smith sent him an email saying she “speaks for the Board, and no more input from me was necessary.” He said all he wanted to do was “properly coach the Board” but that he had been berated. He said what happened at the general membership meeting was unconscionable. He said he spoke with Zremski the day before the meeting and thought they had an understanding that what he (Boyce) wanted was a proper Board vote, to have a policy on co-sponsorships. “I was portrayed at that meeting as the guy coming in an trying to blow this out of the water,” he said.

Zremski said nothing was brought up about the event or the co-sponsorship issue at the general membership meeting. He said Boyce’s email clearly said he planned to offer a motion at the general membership meeting. Leinwand read the email:

"I suggest that a resolution be presented at Friday's General Membership Meeting that in the future the club will not cosponsor events with outside groups. There could be an exception or two for proven, indisputably and inherently impartial events such as the Investigative Reporters and Editors conference. The board could create exceptions in the future if it did so after communicating the proposal to the members, allowing them to speak on the matter, and then holding a board vote."

Boyce and Zremski sketched out their conversations subsequent to that email. Donnelly asked Boyce to wrap up his remarks.

Boyce said the Board should have a co-sponsorship policy. He said Zremski convinced him there wasn’t support on the Board to withdraw the co-sponsorship of the gay marriage panel. Boyce said in that case, the Board should include in a resolution that NLGJA is one of the accepted groups for co-sponsorships. He said it was a falsehood that he was pushing at the general membership meeting for this.

He said the Board is dysfunctional, is not serving the Club well, is having arguments among the Board members. He said the Board “has a deaf ear for hearing members’ views. You want to rush things through, members be damned.”

Kuckro said the question has not been answered as to why it is important to co-sponsor this panel with NLGJA. Zremski said he did not anticipate a controversy and expected that the response would be that the panel is one that would help members who are assigned to cover election issues. He said that as the membership numbers of the Club stagnate, it is important to reach out to other journalism groups.

Cherry said she received a letter from Ken Jost, president of the DC chapter of NLGJA after he lunched with Zremski and Smith. She said he said he was hoping to plan

activities with the NPC and that one issue that cried out for attention is the anti gay marriage issue on many states' ballots.

Zremski said that when he was Professional Affairs chairman three years ago, he proposed a policy that set guidelines for co-sponsoring events. He said he wrote letters to many journalism groups, including NLGJA. He said when he saw Cherry's response to Jost's letter, he saw nothing in it that would have precluded a co-sponsored event.

Cherry said nothing precluded it but there was also nothing in it that would suggest the event go forward. She said the proper procedure would have been for Jost to contact the committee chair. She said the next contact, however, was hers to the Forums chair. She said she has an email from Kuckro to Julie Schoo apologizing for being out of touch and giving his cell and work phone numbers.

Tom Gallagher said his reason for being at the meeting is his concern for how the Club is perceived. He said co-sponsoring events can lead to poor perceptions, especially if the co-sponsoring group advocates for or against gay rights or civil rights.

Bynum noted that she does not have a vote because she is the associate/affiliate representative. But she said she was extremely uncomfortable that the panel had not been conducted in the spring because it is a major issue in the elections. She said it is "disgraceful" that the event had not already been held. She said ignoring the issue until now "reflects on the Club, on the Board, on the leadership."

In addressing Boyce's criticisms of the Board, she said she and Bastarache conduct regular meetings for the affiliate and associate Club members to determine their concerns. She said if Boyce attended, he would find out that they do represent those members.

Leinwand said she believes strongly in reaching out to fellow journalists in NLGJA, National Association of Black Journalists, National Association of Hispanic Journalists and others. She said the NPC can tell when it's being snookered and that a group only wants to co-sponsor something as a way to get a free room. She said the Club would never settle for anything less than a fair and balanced panel. She said the Club should continue the diversity programs that former President Tammy Lytle started, and that includes co-sponsorships. She said she had a conversation with Kuckro in which he had some additional suggestions for speakers on the panel and that he had carried out those ideas.

Cherry said she would like a letter from former presidents included in the minutes. Smith said she would like a letter from other former presidents included. Zremski said he would like a letter from heads of various organizations included. (See attachments.)

Cherry said co-sponsoring news or professional panels with a group whose members would be perceived as having a personal interest is ill-advised. She said it would give the impression that neutrality has given way to whatever views that outside group holds or

perceives to hold. She said that from the start, she agreed to a panel and called on the Forums Committee to do so. She said her only objection was co-sponsoring it with NLGJA and that her only motive is to uphold the Club's neutrality. She said that she would be opposed to co-sponsoring a program on affirmative action with NABJ or a program on immigration with NAHJ. She said the NPC would be remiss to have a panel on those issues and not ask those groups to be participants in the panel but it is not appropriate for the NPC to have a news panel with groups that have a vested interest or perceived vested interest in the topic.

Cherry said that Kuckro made a concerted effort to try to organize the panel and tried to discuss it with Leinwand and Smith. She said he told her (Cherry) that they had cleared the air and were ready to move on. She said that a few days later, a Club member said she was upset that Kuckro had made disparaging remarks about Smith. Leinwand said she had said that the conversation had gotten heated. Zremski said that is an example of how things are spun. Bynum said this part of the meeting was wasting time on emotions rather than addressing the motion.

Donnelly said the key issue is whether NLGJA is an advocacy group or not. He said reasonable people can disagree and that he has given it serious thought. He said he has concluded that it is not an advocacy group. He said it is a bad idea for the Board to make policy on perception and that it should make policy on fact.

He said that, setting aside whether the email vote was valid according to the bylaws, he conducted it to make it clear what policy the Board had set at the September meeting. He said the vote was overwhelming. He said this meeting is another attempt to have what Boyce says is a proper vote.

He told Boyce he is sorry that he (Boyce) thinks the Board is dysfunctional and has a deaf ear. He said Boyce is entitled to his opinion, but the Board has done its best and been as open as it can be.

He said he will appoint a task force at the October meeting to examine co-sponsorships in depth and will make certain that every NPC member can express an opinion.

Cherry read NLGJA's mission statement: [The National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association](#) is an organization of journalists, online media professionals, and students that works from within the journalism industry to foster fair and accurate coverage of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues. NLGJA opposes workplace bias against all minorities and provides professional development for its members.

She said the NLGJA web site also has a letter from its executive director in which she discusses how, when she was a campus activist, media coverage often left her feeling misrepresented. Cherry said a statement from the founder of NLGJA says he is an advocate. She said the problem is that the word "advocate" has taken on a negative connotation. She said NABJ and NAHJ are advocacy groups. She said the problem isn't that they are advocacy groups; the problem is having advocacy groups co-sponsor a news panel on an issue they have advocated.

Leinwand asked if anyone has anything that shows that NLGJA has advocated on gay marriage. Kucko said a press release the organization issued was advocacy. Donnelly said it was explicitly the personal opinion of the authors. He said he didn't see anything in that letter or hear anything that would suggest NLGJA has taken a position on a public policy issue. He said they advocate for fair and equitable treatment of their members in the workplace. He said he has seen nothing that suggests the group advocates on gay marriage.

Boyce thanks for Board for voting on the issue and apologized if he said anything offensive.

The vote on Smith's motion was 5-2 with Smith, Dunham, Leinwand, Donnelly and Zremski voting Yes. Cherry and Gallagher voted No. Bynum said if she had a vote, she would have voted Yes.

Cherry moved and John Gallagher seconded this motion:

Whereas it is agreed that the National Press Club (NPC) Forums Committee is encouraged to pursue coordinating a panel to discuss the implications of ballot measures defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman and outlawing same-sex marriages.

Whereas the NPC president has directed the Forums Committee and NPC staff that the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association has a stated position indicating a vested interest on the issue of the treatment of same-sex couples.

Be it resolved that the National Press Club shall not co-sponsor a panel with the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association on the issue of same-sex marriage.

Be it also resolved that the National Press Club shall invite the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association to present views on any panel of the National Press Club, as the sole sponsor, discussing the issue of same-sex marriages, same-sex couples or the coverage thereof.

Dunham moved to table. The vote was 5-2 with Dunham, Smith, Leinwand, Donnelly and Zremski voting Yes and Cherry and Gallagher voting No. Bynum said if she had a vote, she would have voted Yes.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 pm.

ATTACHMENTS

Oct. 4, 2004

Dear Board Members:

Some of us past presidents are concerned about the discussion over a forum on the same-sex marriage amendment. We have long experience in the difficulty in putting on good forums and on the pressures to balance offers of help and alliances with the need to make sure the National Press Club's role is absolutely impartial.

All of us agree that a forum on the same-sex marriage issue is warranted.

We believe every forum should be organized on these principles:

- The club should not co-sponsor any forum with a group that has a vested interest in the issue or that even appears to have such a vested interest.
- Any forum should be arranged by the forums committee with the full participation of the chairman. The forum committee can seek the advice of any group it likes, but it should select the speakers and moderator.
- Any journalism group is free to organize its own forum at the club without the club's co-sponsorship.
- Unless there are unusual circumstances, the club president should have the final say on what forums the club sponsors.

It is not the intention of past presidents to interfere with the workings of the board. We believe every board needs to make decisions based on current information and conditions. But we are always here to help uphold the timeless traditions of the club.

Sincerely,

Gil Klein
Clayton Boyce
Rich Sammon
Frank Aukofer
John Cosgrove
Don Larrabee
David Hess

October 7, 2004

To: NPC membership

From: Ex-presidents

It has come to our attention that several ex-presidents and other members are concerned about the Club co-sponsoring an event with the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association. We just want our members to know that we think this event should go forward, and that the Club should continue its history of partnership with other journalism organizations.

As the event has been described to us, it will focus on the politics of the same-sex marriage issue in the upcoming election. It will feature a panel that represents all sides of the issue, from the Human Rights Campaign – the nation’s largest gay group – to Concerned Women for America, which strongly opposes same-sex marriage. To us, it sounds like the kind of event the Press Club should be sponsoring.

Furthermore, we think the Club should be encouraging co-sponsorships with journalism organizations like the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association – that is, groups that exist to benefit journalists but that have no public policy agenda. More such co-sponsorships means more good events for Press Club members, and that is always a good thing.

The National Press Club has co-sponsored events with the Washington Association of Black Journalists and the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, and the NLGJA should be given equal treatment.

We understand there were communications problems between the Club and the NLGJA regarding this event, but we don’t think that fact should lead to drastic Club action. We are especially opposed to a proposal to curtail the Club’s future co-sponsorship activities, which were at the heart of its Forums and Professional Affairs programs during our tenures as president.

We think this proposal would seriously limit the Club’s ability to offer relevant programs to its members, while hurting the Club’s reputation as a welcoming home for Washington’s professional journalists. We strongly urge members to reject any effort to curtail the Club’s ability to offer co-sponsored events.

We see such events as an integral part of the National Press Club’s bright future, and we trust that the majority of our members will agree.

Tammy Lytle
President 2003

Jack Cushman
President 2000

Doug Harbrecht
President 1998

Richard Ryan
President 2001

Larry Lipman
President 1999

Sonja Hillgren
President 1996

October 7, 2004

The National Press Club
514 14th St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20045

Dear Press Club members:

We are writing to you because our organizations have partnered with the National Press Club in recent years on important events – or because we know how many journalists have benefited from such partnerships in the past.

We think such partnerships are important – to our organizations, to the Press Club and to the journalism community -- and that is why we feel compelled to address the current issue at the club regarding such events.

We understand that a motion will be made at this Friday's NPC general membership meeting that says "that in the future the club will not cosponsor events with outside groups," except under narrow circumstances that will require NPC board approval.

We urge the club's membership to reject that motion. We see the Club as an integral part of the Washington journalism community, and we fear that the passage of any such resolution will make the Club far less relevant – and far less helpful to journalism organizations and universities.

We understand that this resolution is being considered because of concern regarding an event the Club plans to co-sponsor with the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association. As we understand it, the event is an examination of the politics of the same-sex marriage issue, and it involves speakers on all sides of the issue. To us, it sounds like a legitimate and useful event for the Press Club and the larger journalism community.

You should also know that we regard the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association as a respected group of professional journalists, much like the National Association of Black Journalists and the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, that works for the benefit of its members and journalism in general.

Sincerely,

Bill Kovach

Geneva Overholser
Curtis B. Hurley Chair in Public Affairs Reporting
University of Missouri School of Journalism

Rich Foster

Thomas G. Kunkel,
Dean, Philip Merrill School of Journalism
University of Maryland

Hodding Carter III

Robert Giles
Curator, Nieman Foundation

Andy Alexander
Washington Bureau Chief
Cox Newspapers

Margaret "Peggy" Engel
Director
Alicia Patterson Foundation

Jessica Wehrman
President
Regional Reporters Association

Charlie Ericksen
Editor/Publisher
Hispanic Link

Cherry asked that this email from Bethel be included in the minutes:

John,

If I am unable to make the meeting tonight, please register my vote as a "No" to the proposal/resolution as set forth in your attached memo.

My main concern is that we should not co-sponsor events with organizations that have a vested interest in a public policy issue. I believe that the group is certainly an advocacy group, like NABJ and NAHJ. But when an event is not a social event or a "how-to" professional event, then we should have the event, but not as a co-sponsorship. And, as I said before, some of the wording of the letter the group sent to board members earlier in the month concerns me. Lastly, I am appalled at the way the whole thing has been handled and the blatant disregard of the club president and her thoughts and concerns.