

Making the news media report the news

Pennsylvania state representative Joseph Zeller (D-Lehigh), has submitted legislation for "ethics" control over news reporters in Harrisburg, the state capitol of Pennsylvania. In an interview with Executive Intelligence Review, Rep. Zeller explained why some form of public accountability for newspaper and media reporters is necessary: "In many cases, the press doesn't report the news... they make the news." Therefore, like other officials responsible to the public, journalists—especially those dealing with political news—should be susceptible to some type of public, ethical accountability. Mr. Zeller also explained that his legislation, for financial accountability covering the press in Harrisburg, Pa., is a limited "foot in the door" toward this goal. In addition to his legislative career, Rep. Zeller worked as a reporter for nine newspapers in the Allentown, Pa. area for 25 years, and is currently a columnist for the Emmaus (Pa.) Free Press.

The statement of motivation delivered by Mr. Zeller to his legislative colleagues follows.

Since 1954 I've been representing the public through taxpayers leagues, councilman, mayor and legislator. I've watched the press become militant and abusive towards any public official who challenges their views and biased reporting. Thus their present cry "foul" over my planned ethics code for reporters.

Too many newspapers feel it is an accepted American tradition to throw truthfulness to the winds when reporting news or pushing a pet project. Therefore, the public views them as irresponsible and lacking in credibility; yelling when no wolf exists and hurting the public's right to know.

The press cries "Freedom of the Press" and "First Amendment Protection" where my bill would protect that right, through reporters revealing sources of income; showing possible conflicts of interest....

I know my bill is unpopular with the media. However, I've never been afraid to face issues, if the cause is right.

The track record of the press has been one of poor credibility for too many years and that is why A.I.M. (Accuracy in Media—ed.) was created and our plan to introduce an Ethics Bill just as other states have.

It has become an accepted American tradition by editors to throw truthfulness to the winds when editorializing a story and has unfortunately "to the public who depends upon the press for the truth," brought about a credibility loss.

The first amendment has been seriously abused whereas through it the press feel they are the judge, jury and verdict and untouchable.

They are the only group in America who holds the most power without regulations since the press is mightier than the sword and all they do is cry *first amendment* when challenged.

Since the press is protected through the first amendment to be able to print the news, shouldn't it be the *news actually*, not what the press wants it to be for whatever reasons to aid their cause.

Example: Gloria Steinem—former national leader of NOW who stated in 1977, I quote: "Any legislator who doesn't go along with our cause, write them up and if you can't find anything, create one..."

Members of the press say: Hey, I'm not paid by public funds, you can't include me in an Ethics Code. Hold it—yes, you can. First, your very profession is protected in the First Amendment, but since it is, it must be credible since you are the most powerful group that forms direction and opinions by the public.

This same public votes for representative government and expects this group of people to represent them credibly.

If the press plays politics with certain groups, individuals, for favors or a cause—what's the difference. Then they have violated a serious trust to the public and we know it has happened so flagrantly that the public has become very disillusioned with the press and just doesn't trust it.

Sure writers and editors can make honest mistakes,

but we see a constant misuse of power and we feel the public through this Ethics Law may get better reporting and find who is violating this trust that is given to the press through the First Amendment. Doctors, real estate people and most professionals are licensed and held accountable.

The First Amendment to our Constitution says "Freedom of the Press." However, with this power comes responsibility since this amendment was designed to help protect the public from those who could exploit them.

When our forefathers over 200 years ago designed our Constitution, the press was small, personal and effective. The editors and writers and publishers were well-known, respected members of the community. Today with the monopolized giant news media we have found the press has become a questionable source of news in too many instances; they don't write the actual news, they make it. Therefore, there has become a terrible and scary credibility gap which threatens the nation.

The accountability bill

Amending the act of October 4, 1978 (P.L.883, No. 170), entitled "An act relating to conflicts of interest involving certain public officials serving in State or State agencies and local political subdivision positions and prohibiting certain public employees from engaging in certain conflict of interest activities requiring certain disclosures and providing penalties," requiring employees of the news media who are regularly and ordinarily assigned to news coverage of the General Assembly to file financial statements:

The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania hereby enacts as follows:

Section 1. Section 4, act of October 4, 1978 (P.L.883, No. 170), referred to as the Public Official and Employee Ethics Law, is amended by adding a subsection to read:

Section 4. Statement of financial interests required to be filed. (q) Every employee of the news media regularly or ordinarily assigned to news coverage of the General Assembly shall file with the commission, the Secretary of the Senate and the Chief Clerk of the House of Representatives a statement of financial interests for the preceding calendar year no later than May 1 of each year.

Section 2. This act shall take effect in 60 days.

Rep. Zeller: there is a need

Here, Representative Zeller explains his legislation and discusses the problem of coordinated political manipulation by the media.

EIR: *I understand why you have oriented the actual ethics legislation narrowly toward reporters in Harrisburg, the Pennsylvania state capital, only. I would like to ask you some questions about the broader issues concerned with how the press creates rather than reports the news.*

For example, I know that you were involved in helping to bring about investigations into exactly what happened in the Three Mile Island nuclear plant incident. That was an excellent example of the press creating a false picture of the situation and misinforming the public.

Zeller: That is true. What has happened is that the press does not write the news, they make it. For example, from the "Burn, Baby, Burn" period of the 60s, a lot of the journalists who graduated from various colleges were involved in these campus strikes, are now editors, writers, at newspapers throughout the country and they have very liberal views. They are "shakers and makers" with regard to changes in the government, and so they've gotten away from the first amendment, which means the right and freedom of the press, and peoples' right to know. They have abused that to the point that the people no longer have a right to know. They are supposed to, but the press doesn't think so. The press thinks: 'we will guide them mentally the way we want to by the hogwash that we give out to them. We will guide public opinion in the direction we want.'

That's what happened with the various terrorist groups around the world and in this country. It's happening all over and the press is part and parcel of this whole operation, because it is infiltrated by those types of individuals. So I see the picture where they have eaten away at the first amendment, freedom of the press, and the right to know of the public.

EIR: *What groups and individuals, interest groups, forces, and so forth do you think are responsible for this?*

Zeller: The fact is that these people are tied into what I call the "international operation" of a group of people who absolutely feel that there should be no growth in this country.... They're socialized into a socialistic form of government, and "Big Daddy" is going to do everything for them. They don't realize that the very system that made them, that brought them to this point in time...is the capitalistic form of government...which has made it possible for these people to yak, to voice their opinions, to go to college, and so forth. They