

Madison Resolution

WHEREAS, the editorial writer's voice — in print and broadcast — has been unique and invaluable in civic conversation for decades;

WHEREAS, editorial writers at their best show no fear or favor, promote no interest but the public interest, have no hidden agendas but instead foster better civic understanding and informed citizen engagement, as was expressed in the Basic Statement of Principles of the National Conference of Editorial Writers: "The chief duty of (editorial writing) is to provide information and guidance toward sound judgments that are essential to the healthy functioning of a democracy";

WHEREAS, in recent years the editorial voice has been muted as the number of editorial writers has diminished, along with editorials, such that many communities have all but lost that voice in their civic conversation;

WHEREAS, this decline is plain to see:

**The number of editorials appearing in daily journalism today reflects the reduction in staff: more and more news organizations no longer offer their readers/viewers editorials; papers that once published multiple daily editorials now do so only a few times a week; editorial endorsement of candidates for local and state offices, including judges, is becoming rarer; as news organizations shift their operations online, they eliminate the unsigned editorial.

**The National Conference of Editorial Writers was a dynamic professional organization that once had more than 600 members, maintained high professional standards and held well-attended annual conferences to promote, expand and improve editorial advocacy, a mission reflected in NCEW's quarterly journal, *The Masthead*; after joining with the National Broadcast Editorial Association, began seeing declines in membership, particularly during the last decade; despite NCEW's efforts to attract members by renaming itself the Association of Opinion Journalists, its numbers dwindled to 160 before it merged with ASNE in 2016; at which time the only professional group dedicated solely to editorial advocacy ceased to exist;

WHEREAS, these developments have coincided with:

** an era of increasing mistrust, ambivalence and hostility toward the

media; the rise of spurious reporting, hackers, the compromise of personal security and other civic intrusions;

** a cacophony of opinion, bias and vitriol;

** corrosive partisanship;

** hidden or subversive agendas and dark fantasies

— all flouting NCEW's standards of fairness, accuracy and intellectual integrity, with barely a whisper of lip service to the public interest;

WHEREAS, the need for the kind of civic advocacy represented by editorial writers is acknowledged by authors including William Davies in his new book "Nervous States: Democracy and the Decline of Reason," in a call for leaders to use "imagery, sound and speech" to prioritize reason over impulse and democracy over self-interest and polarization; and David Selbourne in "The Free Society in Crisis," where he prescribes a "practical renewal of the politics and ethics of the civic commonwealth, resting upon a social contract of reciprocal rights and duties";

AND WHEREAS, there is still an opportunity to rekindle the flame of editorial advocacy in journalism, to restore the full-throated voice of the editorial writer and preserve the unique contribution editorials make to the communities they serve, and thus to the democratic process;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the undersigned veteran members of NCEW/AOJ do hereby call for active measures on behalf of editorial writing, including but not limited to the following:

Explore institutional funding streams (foundations, endowments, grants, subsidies, other philanthropy) to provide for the hiring of editorial writers so as to amplify and expand editorial advocacy.

Incorporate editorial writing into the growing readership of digital media.

Support the kind of professional education and services provided by the Masthead and AOJ/NCEW to maintain the quality and impact of editorials.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the undersigned commit to follow up this resolution with continued attention to promoting editorial writing and ensuring that editorials play a vital role in journalism, in civic life and in our democracy.

This resolution was submitted for consideration during the NCEW reunion in Madison, Wisconsin, April 27, 2019. It was edited by Fred Fiske following discussions at the meeting, with additional contributions from John McClelland, Marjorie Arons-Barron, Phineas Fiske and Tom Still.

SIGNED

Name

(background (number of years writing/broadcasting editorials, what paper or station))