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Letter to Roger J. Traynor Regarding Stanford Daily's article, "Press Monitors Asks Public Aid"

Harry N. Press
Stanford University

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Justice Roger Traynor  
Hastings College of the Law  
198 McAllister Street  
San Francisco, CA 94102  

Dear Justice Traynor:

I hope you had no classes today, because you certainly earned a day of rest with the tremendous amount of work you took upon your shoulders Tuesday. (It would be more accurate to say the tremendous amount we laid upon your shoulders.)

But I guess that when there's a worthwhile cause, it's worth working for, and you did just that.

The Fellows tell me they enjoyed very much having the opportunity to talk with you, and even more important, we all needed the chance to begin to understand the Press Council.

Thanks very much for spending so much time with us at Stanford. It was an enriching experience for all of us.

With all best wishes.

Sincerely,

Harry N. Press  
Associate Director

Enclosure:  
Clipping from today's  
Stanford Daily.
Support For First Amendment

Press Monitor Asks Public Aid

By KEVIN SMITH
National News Council Chairman Roger Traynor said yesterday, "The First Amendment is just as much a concern of the general public as it is of the news media."

The former California Supreme Court Chief Justice defended the National News Council before 150 persons in a communication class and on KZSU's Campus Conference program.

The Council, which was established this year, receives complaints against national suppliers of news, including the major television networks, the wire services, and the syndicated news services. It has come under criticism from most news media which consider the Council harmful to a free and uncensored press.

Traynor declared it was "utterly and completely ridiculous" to argue that the National News Council will have a chilling effect on the news media.

"Just as justice is not the sole prerogative of the courts," Traynor said, "so the protection of First Amendment freedoms is not the sole prerogative of the news media."

Advocates of the Council feel it will help restore public confidence in the news media. According to Traynor, the actions of the Council hopefully will "raise the percentage of [last year's] Harris poll" which showed only 18 percent of the public trusted the print media, while only 17 percent trusted television news.

Contesting the charges that the Council represents the first step toward government control of news media, Traynor said he has "a great fear and horror [of] the government moving in on the media."

Traynor said the Council has the duty to "protect and preserve the freedom of the press...and to afford an opportunity for people who have a grievance to have that grievance aired."

He admitted that the Council has no enforcement powers and said that the Council's major weapon is publicity of its decisions.

Traynor said a decision in favor of a complainant would "give the complainant vindication of his grievance" and would set "a precedent for other news media to follow."

The fifteen member Council just finished moving into its New York headquarters, and Traynor conceded, "Not many people are aware of the News Council as yet."

"We did get one complaint which said that every time [ABC anchor] Harry Reasoner mentions our President, he has a leer," Traynor recounted. "I don't think we'll take up that one."

DEFENDS COUNCIL — National News Council Chairman Roger Traynor spoke yesterday before 150 persons in a communication class and on KZSU's Campus Conference program. Traynor is a former California Supreme Court Chief Justice.

—Daily photo by Keith Copeland