



American Federation of Television and Radio Artists

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AFTRA NATIONAL BOARD SUPPORTS THE RIGHTS OF JOURNALISTS IN NEWS GATHERING

Los Angeles, CA, November 21, 2004 -- The AFTRA National Board, in plenary session yesterday, unanimously passed two resolutions in response to the increasing legal pressure being brought to bear on journalists for their use of traditional news gathering methods. "It appears that the very act of news gathering itself is now under attack in this country. It is frightening to contemplate an environment where journalists are routinely thrown in jail for simply asking questions and seeking information in the course of providing accurate and timely information to the public," noted Rebecca Rhine, Assistant National Executive Director.

The two resolutions are set forth below:

Re: Federal Shield Law and Jim Taricani

1. Whereas, an increasing number of journalists are being summoned before grand juries and asked to reveal the identify of sources to whom the journalists have given promises of confidentiality in exchange for information valuable to the public which might otherwise not come to light; and
2. Whereas, those journalists are frequently being threatened with sanctions for refusing to betray those promises of confidentiality and reveal the sources of the information; and
3. Whereas, one such journalist, Jim Taricani, of station WJAR has been found in contempt of court for refusing to reveal a source who exposed political corruption in Providence, Rhode Island, and as a result now faces the possibility of a six month jail sentence,

Be it resolved that:

4. The National Board of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists recognizes the value to society of the continuous flow of information, including information from confidential sources; and

5. Expresses its full and unwavering support for Taricani; and
6. Unanimously supports the call for a federal shield law covering all reporters and urges the presidents of all national news organizations, as well as all local news directors and other organizations representing journalists to join in that call.

Re: Arrest of Reporter for Calling the Subject of a Story

1. Whereas, reporter Demorris Lee of the *News Observer* newspaper in Raleigh, North Carolina, has been arrested on charges of harassment after leaving two telephone messages on the voice mail of a story subject, simply asking if that subject wanted to respond to allegations against her; and
2. Whereas, the content of the messages was neither threatening nor profane, and merely solicited comment, a normal and appropriate journalistic technique; and
3. Whereas, the issuance of an arrest warrant to block a reporter seeking comment on a story of public interest is itself not in the public interest; and
4. Whereas, such warrants are antithetical to the interests of a free and open society, protected by vigorous and inquiring reporting,

Be it resolved that:

5. The National Board of Directors of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists expresses its full support for Demorris Lee; and
6. Deplores the issuance of arrest warrants for conduct that amounts to the appropriate, normal everyday conduct of journalism; and
7. Calls on the appropriate judicial authorities in North Carolina to investigate whether the magistrate who issued the warrant, Angel Foster, acted appropriately.

The American Federation of Television and Radio Artists -- affiliated with the AFL-CIO -- is a diverse union representing nearly 80,000 professional broadcasters and performers nationwide working in news and entertainment programming on television and radio as well as in the sound recording industry, commercials and industrial work, and newer technologies such as interactive games, Internet production and CD ROMs.

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