

Summer miscellanea from the MPA Hotline Attorney

This past month the single most repeated inquiry has been the need for "Paid For By" language. The Missouri Ethics Commission maintains a two-page flier that summarizes the rules on when "Paid For By" disclaimers must be printed on ads. Keep it handy. It does a good job of boiling down what must be done.

But here I now attempt to distill it even further: If any person or thing wants to pay a newspaper to publish anything relative to any candidate or ballot measure, the "Paid For By" language must appear: When in doubt, require the language. This would be a wise in-house policy to adopt.

Why such a conservative approach? While the run-of-the-mill political ad is an easy call, the newspaper will bear the risk of a fine in all borderline cases. The statute at issue requires the language be in any advertisement "relative to" a ballot measure. That's one of the broadest phrases of the legal world.* The Ethics Commission might well take a different position than the newspaper, the candidate or even me. The gray areas are gambles.

*The phrase "arising out of" is the only one that might be more expansive.

Other noteworthy items from last month:

- On August 28, 2024, the new exception to the Missouri Sunshine Law permitting closure of reports of

improper governmental activities to the Missouri State Auditor takes effect.

Ostensibly, this provision should encourage more individuals to come forward and report suspected governmental wrongdoing. But there are already strong whistleblower laws in place to protect state workers from retaliation. This new provision now shrouds those reports in secrecy so long as the state auditor chooses.

It will be interesting to see if the auditor reports any increase in received reports following August 28, 2024.

- Publishers gained a new tool to register a group of news website updates all at once at the U.S. Copyright Office. The office calls it "Group Registration for Updates to a News Website" – or GRNW.

Under this new option, a publisher may in a single instance submit the initial version of a website published in a calendar month, which can then include subsequent updates published the same month. Moreover, the complete contents of the website do not need to be uploaded.



CALENDAR

August

19 — Sleeping Room Reservation Deadline for Annual Convention

19 — Early Bird Registration Deadline for 158th Annual Convention, Springfield

September

19-21 — Missouri Press Association's 158th Annual Convention, Springfield

22-28 — Missouri Photo Workshop, Kennett

26-27 — National Newspaper Association Foundation Annual Convention, Omaha, Neb.

October

17 — Missouri Photojournalism Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony, Columbia

17 — Ozark Press Association Annual Meeting, Willow Springs*

*The August edition of *Missouri Press News* erroneously listed the wrong city for OPA's planned meeting.

Did you know?

You can find all of the latest registration forms for Missouri Press' events online at www.mopress.com.

The website also has award nomination forms, board of director applications and much more.

Reserve your sleeping room for the Convention by Aug. 19!
To reserve a sleeping room for MPA's 158th Annual Convention and Trade Show, contact Debra Yokum at sales@hotelvandivort.com or call (417) 851-5209.
Aug. 19 is also the deadline for early bird registration.
We can't wait to see you in Springfield!