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REGIONAL SERVICE FEE: NOTES FROM DORI

On Nov. 17, 2016, Region 3 Director Michael Koretzky emailed me that he was instituting the “regional service fee” permitted by SPJ.

He specified his reasoning as:

“SPJ Florida is flush, so I'm taking from the rich and giving some to the new – the just-reformed SPJ Alabama and still-embryonic SPJ South Carolina. The rest of the money I'll spend on a program for Florida, and for which the chapter can take credit in its annual report.”

On Nov. 29, SPJ Associate Executive Director Tara Puckey provided me with an invoice about that fee. Later, Puckey provided the Oct. 15, 2005 minutes where the service fee was approved by the national board. The approval states that:

Professional chapters will be assessed a regional service fee based on chapter membership. The fee provides revenue for the regional director fund. The funds would be used for: planning the regional conference; Mark of Excellence expenses; and regional-related projects and programs.

Fee based on Oct. 1 membership
National office creates a uniform invoice
Regional Director must have a bank account in the region's name
Regional Director must create a two-person account oversight committee made up of presidents of largest professional and campus chapters.
Regional Directors can choose not to collect the assessment.

Tara notes that this has never been used or implemented until now.

Because of this approval, SPJ Georgia Pro President Ellen Eldridge and I will serve as the “two-person oversight committee.”

According to the approval, SPJ Florida had 134 chapter members as of Oct. 1 and therefore required to pay \$500 for the service fee.

On Nov. 30, Koretzky amended his original plan to say that the money SPJ Florida provides will go to Florida only, and not other chapters. In his email to Tara, Ellen and I, he said:

“I changed my original plan to address your concerns. My central point was and remains: Your chapters, while strong, can do more. Extracting money forces us to spend it, and because we're all good people, we'll spend it well and creatively.”

On Dec. 1, I offered a counter proposal of giving SPJ Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina \$100 each if the taxing of the region was revoked. That proposal was denied. Koretzky's reasoning:

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“The goal here is to conceive new programming. I realize this is a weird and annoying way to do it. But I’ve tried other ways and failed. That’s on me, so I’m availing myself of all legal options. If this doesn’t work, either, I’ll say mea culpa and scratch the tax for next year. But let’s talk and see what happens. The worst is nothing.”

This all came soon after the Nov. 10 board meeting where Koretzky abruptly left, and in a follow-up email he stated this chapter isn’t doing enough (to him). He stated:

“I’m done asking your chapter for money to host programs. Instead, I’ll tax your chapter and do them myself. I’ll explain that process later on Slack, but it’s a power RDs possess yet I’ve never invoked. If you don’t pay the tax, I declare you ‘a chapter not in good standing,’ and you’re ineligible to win Chapter of the Year and piss off some old people.”

At this point I’d like to note that as long as I’ve been on this board, we have never denied funding to any project or program Michael Koretzky has asked for. I looked at board meeting minutes, which are always available on our website for anyone to see, and in 2016 alone we approved:

- \$3,800 for a two-year contract for SSA software that he also uses
- \$500 for Muslimedia, local event
- \$750 for Zombie Stories event (100 T-shirts for event held at Region 3 conference)
- \$750 for First Amendment Free Food Festival event (50 T-shirts sent throughout country for FAFFF events)
- \$200 for FAU journalism training for newsrooms

In 2015 we approved:

- \$2,175 for Will Write for Food (In Florida, but paid for students’ board and food outside of Florida)
- \$1,500 for Forging the Future (Region 3 conference)

I inherently believe that people with fundamental differences on methods of teaching, educating, and enlightening can live harmoniously and in the same world as each other. This taxing makes me believe that Michael Koretzky believes only his way is the right way, and there is no other way. Now, more than ever, we should be working together, but implementing this tax is only dividing us.