

10 March 2005

Sig Gissler  
Administrator, Pulitzer Prizes  
Columbia University  
709 Journalism Building  
2950 Broadway  
New York, New York 10027

Dear Prof. Gissler:

I am writing to voice a measure of concern with one of the nominees for the Pulitzer Prize for investigative journalism.

I was startled to read a recent posting on Wonkette.com that listed an alleged short list for Pulitzer Prize finalists. Included in the list is the Portland, Oregon-based *Willamette Week* for a story regarding the former mayor and Oregon governor, Neil Goldschmidt. The story concerns an affair and statutory rape committed by Goldschmidt during his tenure as mayor of Portland in the 1970s.

While the story may look intriguing from a distance, a closer look raises questions regarding its worth as a Pulitzer nominee. (In the spirit of full disclosure: I am the managing editor for a cross-town weekly newspaper. Please assign whatever prejudice and jealousy you wish to my perspective.)

First, the story was not uncovered in the traditional, hard-digging investigative sense of the word. It was dropped on the doorstep of the *Willamette Week*. At the same time, the same bundle of incriminating information was provided to a columnist, Phil Stanford, at another paper in town, the *Portland Tribune*. *Willamette Week* rushed the story to press because they were concerned about being scooped by Stanford—and, ultimately, they were, as both the *Tribune* and the *Oregonian* broke the story days before *Willamette Week*'s story hit the streets.

Second, the rumor about Goldschmidt's affair was well known. Subsequent stories have been published about the numerous political luminaries in the area who knew about the affair. Moreover and more damning, Robert Burtchaeil, one of the *Willamette Week*'s founders, was also the man assigned to "handle" (as in silencing) the woman that Goldschmidt raped. This "handling" and cover-up were happening at the very same time that Burtchaeil was helping to set up the newspaper. It is unnerving that one of the pillars of the newspaper was apparently simultaneously and intimately involved in the story's

cover-up. How can a Pulitzer be awarded to a newspaper that had the cover-up occurring right under their very noses, if not within their offices?

The far-reaching impact of the story is undeniable. Goldschmidt has been one of the most influential and important politicians in Oregon's history. That said, when considering the award for investigative journalism, I hope that the Pulitzer Prize board will consider ancillary information about how the story came about. Before awarding such prestige, I think that there are several questions that should be asked and answered.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Phil Busse  
Managing Editor  
*Portland Mercury*