

KPFA Community Advisory Board draft minutes Sunday, June 21, 2015, 11 AM -1 PM at the Grassroots House, 2022 Blake Street in Berkeley.

CAB Members present: Steve Martinot, Carol Wolfley, Rahman Jamaal Jennifer Fazio, facilitated CAB Nominee Present: Karen Nyhus

Agenda.Resolutions and Notes,

1. Brief introductions with names and one sentence each. **Read Resolution:** We will time shares during meetings for all present of 1 to 2 minutes each with possible CAB member agreements for time extensions upon request. All present will have an opportunity to share on agenda items with CAB facilitation for staying on topic and honoring time agreements and calling on people who have raised their hands. A CAB member will take stack, tracking the order in which people raise their hands and also prioritizing those who have not spoken.

Community input time 15 minutes for community members to speak with time divided equally and if more than 5 are present adjustments will be made as needed.

Karen Nyhus brought concerns, questions and proposals about FSN and the group voted in support of the following resolution.

Members of the CAB will bring this issue to the upcoming LSB meeting in their report to the LSB,request that it be placed on the agenda for discussion and follow up with questions and requests from KPFA Station Management, News Department, KPFA listeners and Pacifica Executive Director.

SUMMARY: from Karen Nyhus

This statement questions the value of Feature Story News, or "FSN," on KPFA, by asking and answering questions about FSN, requests a formal inquiry by the LSB to station management and a poll by the CAB of listeners, and makes a proposal for how to replace it in a community-based way, if it is deemed less than desirable by the KPFA community of listeners.

Statements

FSN has been integrated into KPFA news for several years now.

Who and What are Feature Story News?

FSN is a for-profit (dot-com) corporation.

FSN's internet domain, featurestorynews.com, is registered to FeatureStory.com (both Registrant and Admin are "markss@featurestory.com."

featurestory.com is similarly registered to [Simon Marks@csps.com](http://SimonMarks@csps.com), which is the Christian Science Publishing Society.

Like FSN, the Christian Science Monitor claims to be "an independent broadcast news agency" (<http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0308/p11s01-coop.html>) but their parent company is the Christian Science Church.

FSN brags about their production of VNRs: "video news releases," or VNRs, are **paid advertisements disguised as news**. The below quote is from <http://featurestorynews.com/corporate-production/> as of June 29, 2015

"Feature Story News enjoys a strong reputation for concepting, scripting, producing and editing distinctive corporate video productions that exceed the demands of our clients.

These clients—including high profile corporations, trade associations, foundations and non-governmental organizations—turn to us for the production of Video News Releases (VNRs), Public Service Announcements (PSAs) and documentary-style corporate video productions that break through and make an impact."

What is FSN's coverage like?

FSN's coverage is mainstream at best; some have compared it to the BBC or Voice of America (VOA), the official propaganda arm of the United States Government (which is prohibited from broadcasting in the US). In the link cited below, FSN's founder Simon Marks is credited with producing 'news' for right-wing and government propaganda outlets including, respectively, Fox and VOA.

Where is FSN?

featurestorynews.com has blocked the Internet Archive's "Wayback machine" (which archives websites) from crawling (and thus archiving) it. But per the Wayback Machine, in 1998, featurestory.com (the predecessor to FSN) claimed DC, London, Moscow and Jerusalem. As of 2008, they claimed "offices in" DC, London, New York, Moscow, and Tehran. In 2012, FSN announced the opening of bureaus in Miami, SF, Houston and LA (the last three of which are in Pacifica's market):

<http://current.org/2012/05/feature-story-news-to-open-four-new-bureaus/>. As of their current Wikipedia entry, in 2015, they claim to have "the company has offices, correspondents and studios in [Manhattan](#), [United Nations](#), [London](#), [Brussels](#), [Moscow](#), [Orlando](#), [San Francisco](#), [Houston](#), [Denver](#), [Los Angeles](#), [Miami](#), [Toronto](#), [Kampala](#) and [Johannesburg](#)." But their website (whose posts on the subject are dated 2013) lists only DC and London offices, and no longer has a page about "bureaus" (worldwide or other).

Who is Simon Marks?

Marks founded FSN in 1992 and has been producing content for the PBS News Hour since 1994.

Marks also produced President Obama's 2012 "virtual" interview from Google Headquarters, which was **broadcast on KPFA**:

<http://www.simonmarks.com/2012/02/producing-a-history-making-event-at-the-white-house/>

As of 2010, Simon Marks, FSN's founder and leading figure, was an executive at the PBS (formerly McNeil-Lehrer) News Hour, and was named President of McNeil-Lehrer Productions:

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/pressrelease/pbs-newshour-associate-executive-producer-simon-marks-named-president-of-macneil-lehrer-productions/>

What does the parent company, CSPS, do?

For one thing, they support VNRs, if only in a backhanded way. The Christian Science Monitor, a sister publication of CSPS, produced a piece in 2006 (<http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0428/p11s03-altv.html>) explaining VNRs, yet mostly quoted individuals who opposed government regulation of VNRs, or labeling of them, and instead featured quotes exhorting news outlets to "be transparent" (i.e., voluntarily label or disclose their VNRs). Logically, doing so would defeat the deceptive purpose of VNRs, and cause clients to leave. So the piece concludes with a one-paragraph guide to viewers on how to spot VNRs for themselves. This piece purports to advocate for transparency but takes an entirely deregulated approach, defacto supporting a position which allows the public to continue to be deceived unless they are extremely saavy and diligent news consumers.

They also aggressively moved from faltering print into the broadcast media space over the last 3 decades, damaging church coffers and failing along the way:

CSPS took on a major media expansion in the 1980s and 1990s, moving from the long-established newspaper into new media, including radio, shortwave, and TV:

<http://www.csmonitor.com/1986/0530/amon.html> <-- note the opinion piece about VOA "losing to communist China" linked at the bottom of this page
<http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/the-christian-science-publishing-society-history/>

In 1988, staff of the CSM paper quit over cuts and layoffs, which were done to pay for broadcast media acquisitions:

In 1994, two years after Marks founded FSN, leaders sued the Church for leaving them \$83 million in debt due to their media purchases:

http://articles.latimes.com/1994-01-01/news/mn-7388_1_christian-science-church

According to Monitoring the News: The Brilliant Launch and Sudden Collapse of the Monitor Channel, the monitor broadcasting system, intended as CNN-like, failed dramatically:

<https://books.google.com/books?id=6JxzCQAAQBAJ&dq=%22Monitor+broadcasting%22+%22christian+science%22>.

How does FSN appear on KPFA airwaves?

Over time, FSN "reporters" on KPFA have reduced their announcement of their affiliations. Whereas they used to say, "From Feature Story News, I'm so-and-so," they later moved to signing off with "From bureaus worldwide," and now often only give reporters' names without even identifying as FSN. **No other news source on KPFA goes remotely so unattributed.** Even independent "stringers" like Ann Garrison sign off with a name and affiliation/s: "for Pacifica, KPFA and Afrobeat Radio, this is Anne Garrison."

We never hear where their "worldwide bureaus" are, but almost all their reporters have British accents and the only business offices (including studios they advertise to rent) are in Washington, D.C. and London (see above on "Where is FSN?").

The parent company, CSPS, has been criticized in the past by former staff for being duplicitous: telling members of the First Church of Christ, Scientist, about the religious mission of this parent organization, while telling the public that its news outlets (Monitor Broadcasting, the Christian Science Monitor newspaper, etc.) were "secular:"

http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1992-09-02/features/1992246098_1_world-monitor-non-church-christian-science-church

Where does FSN get its money?

According to the editors at the very similarly-named FSRN, the global grassroots Free-Speech Radio News, FSN is given away free to KPFA. This would seem peculiar for a for-profit company. Why would they do that?

PROPOSAL

First, the LSB should ask the specific questions below of management. Answers to those questions should be returned to the CAB in a timely way. Then, the CAB should present those answers, as well as documented and vetted information from this statement, to listeners, and solicit feedback from listeners and subscribers (as the CAB deems appropriate) about whether FSN is appropriate for KPFA. For those listeners who are critical, have the CAB simultaneously ask them for alternative (other) news feeds (streams, podcasts, feeds, wires, etc.) they are aware of which might be used to replace it. The CAB

might also present a preliminary list of such alternative news feeds it deems appropriate to seed and inspire the conversation, particularly including as many different types of "feeds" as possible in the examples.

QUESTIONS for MANAGEMENT

- 1) How did FSN get on KPFA airwaves? When, on whose initiative, on whose decision, and with what process and rationale/reason?**
- 2) What if any contractual or written agreement, including MOU, LOI, etc. covers the receiving and airing of FSN on KPFA or Pacifica? Can we see it?**
- 3) What, if anything, does KPFA pay for FSN? Has it ever paid for FSN? If so, how much, and when?**
- 4) What listener feedback have the LSB and/or station management received regarding FSN to date?**
- 5) Are other Pacifica stations carrying FSN? Why or why not?**
- 6) What alternative news sources could KPFA use to fill the gap if FSN were eliminated? *The CAB is happy to provide a list of long-standing alternative feeds which would serve diverse community needs (similar to the bits of National Native News which have lately been aired).***

Submitted by Karen Nyhus, CAB applicant speaking as a member of the public

2.CAB Membership: appointments postponed by LSB until July 2015, carte for radio will be resent with invitation for new nominations,

3. Follow up the LSB proposal about local community news and public affairs including:

Expand use of video channel and live streaming channel to cover local news and public affairs and cultural events. Utilize Twitter, Facebook and live stream channels to get up to the minute information for news and public affairs programs.

Proposals for community connection for livestreaming and participation of KPFA at US Social Forum and forwarding audio or video segments .

.4. No response to CAB Community Needs Assessment requests for programming goals from Station management addressing need to

- Develop and implement station wide plans for local news and public affairs programming that includes addressing community issues, including working with individuals and organizations acting in alignment with KPFA's mission.
- Promote connection of programmers with individuals and organizations working on police terror, social justice, Bay Area development, environmental destruction and other topics of interest mentioned in the report.

- Expand the station use of livestreaming and social media resources and increase outreach to youth.

5..KPFA Local Station Board Elections and volunteer membership for CAB members ."

6.Community feedback about Gary Null

7. Upcoming monthly CAB meeting is scheduled for Sunday, July 26, 2015, 11 am to 1 pm at the Grass Roots House. 2022 Blake St., Berkeley, CA.