

Restoring Media and Press Freedom

1
2
3 **WHEREAS** the United States was the first country to incorporate the concept of a free
4 press in its founding documents;

5
6 **WHEREAS** many nations took note of what the United States had done and
7 incorporated the idea of a free press in their governing principles;

8
9 **WHEREAS** the international organization Reporters Without Borders conducts an
10 annual survey on how well countries foster a free press;

11
12 **WHEREAS** Reporters Without Borders' 2016 World Freedom Index ranks the U.S. 41st
13 of 180 countries;

14
15 **WHEREAS** Reporters Without Borders note that the United States' relatively low rating
16 is the result of the US government's 'war on whistleblowers who leak information about
17 its surveillance activities, spying and foreign operations, especially those linked to
18 counter-terrorism," and the lack of a federal "shield law" that would allow journalists to
19 protect confidential sources.

20
21 **WHEREAS** the value of a free and unfettered press has been proven time and again by
22 providing the American public, as well as its leaders, with important and accurate
23 information that was contrary to official government pronouncements, policies, and
24 actions;

25
26 **WHEREAS** often the most accurate and useful information about our government at
27 home and abroad comes to us by fearless, perceptive journalists: the Vietnam war,
28 Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq, and the governments' cavalier handling of
29 Americans' privacy exposed by Edward Snowden and others;

30
31 **WHEREAS** Federal prosecutors regularly neuter whistleblower laws by resorting to the
32 1917 Espionage Act, which is thoroughly inappropriate for addressing freedom of the
33 press issues, and which allows no nuance (You wrote it, or said it: you are guilty; no
34 extenuating circumstances necessary or accepted);

35
36 **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that we, the Washington State Democratic Party, call
37 on the President, Congress, and the Justice Department to reinforce our tradition of a
38 free press by protecting whistleblowers from retaliation and prosecution;

39
40 **THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that in whistleblower cases the President,
41 Congress, and the Justice Department adopt positions of neutrality during the

42 investigation until final conclusions are reached, in order to help assure an unbiased
43 process;

44

45 **THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that Congress enact a comprehensive
46 shield law to assure reporters (defined by their activities, not their employer) the
47 uncontestable right to withhold the identities of their sources, thereby encouraging
48 reporting of illegal, improper, or wasteful government activities; and

49

50 **THEREFORE BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that the President, Congress, and the
51 Justice Department make concerted and publicized efforts to restore the country's goal
52 of having freedom of the press.

53

54

55 Submitted by the Pierce County Convention.

56

57 The Platform Committee recommended that this resolution be passed at their June 17,
58 2016 meeting.

59

60 The 2016 Washington State Democratic Convention passed this resolution on June 18,
61 2016.

62