



Buckeye Firearms Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Plain Dealer Abandons Journalistic Ideals in Coverage of Self-Defense News

CLEVELAND - While most of Ohio's news media have done a fair-to-admirable job covering the issue of self-defense, Cleveland's *Plain Dealer* appears to have abandoned any pretext of journalistic integrity on this topic.

Consider several recent stories: *A boy dies, and a gun debate is reignited* (April 24, 2007), *Tragedy at Virginia Tech* (April 18, 2007), and *Gun advocates in massacre find a call to arms* (April 19, 2007).

In each case, the journalists involved ignored facts and evidence available to them and even ignored their own previous reporting, resulting in factually inaccurate and misleading stories.

We therefore issue this open challenge to the Ohio media and the *Plain Dealer*, which claims to be a member of your professional ranks.

From the Society of Professional Journalists, we see that the preamble to the Code of Ethics states, "The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues." Beyond this, in the specific ethical cannons, we see that a journalist should:

- Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.
- Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context.
- Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.

In trying to understand how journalists gauge each other as peers, we turned to journalism professors and looked at their grading criteria. Fairly representative of the group we find the University of Georgia syllabus for Journalism 3410, a Lab, which states in its grading criteria:

Fact Error(s) and Grades: Any assignment written in Associated Press style that contains a fact error or errors will get a grade of “F.” Common fact errors are found in names, addresses, ages, quotes and narration. Be certain to proofread your copy carefully before you turn it in to me.

In looking at the three stories above specifically, and past news stories generally, we see numerous instances of inadvertent error, contrary to the Ethics Code and professional criteria. Further damning, we see examples of deliberate distortion, again contrary to the Ethics Code and professional criteria. These errors and distortions clearly present a picture of advocacy and favored treatment for special interests, also contrary to the Ethics Code.

While we clearly feel that the *Plain Dealer* stands exposed for violating the Code of Ethics and professional journalist criteria, we feel it is not our place to pass judgment. Rather, turning to the code of ethics, we see journalists are to be accountable. Specifically, journalists should

- Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.
- Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.
- Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.
- Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.
- Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.

In this spirit of accountability, we accept their invitation to discuss their journalistic conduct and would like to air our grievances while exposing the unethical practices of the *Plain Dealer*. We issue the attached indictment of the *Plain Dealer's* coverage of self-defense issues, and invite them to respond on a point by point rebuttal and correct their mistakes promptly.

Further, taking to heart the journalist's obligation to expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media, we invite the rest of Ohio's media to investigate the *Plain Dealer* and respond accordingly.

The media often portrays itself as watchdogs for the public good when justifying their reporting. Ohio waits and wonders if Ohio's media is willing to police one of their own.

Buckeye Firearms Association is a grassroots political action committee dedicated to defending and advancing the rights of Ohio citizens to own and use firearms for all legal activities, including self-defense, hunting, competition, and recreation.

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