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MEDIA

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A Critic of the Press and Its Duty

By John Carmody

James Keogh, the former Time executive who says he first saw the dangers of advocacy journalism when he joined the Nixon campaign in 1968 said yesterday the media must renew devotion to its "basic mission—to inform; to tell, not sell."

Author of "President Nixon and the Press," published earlier this year, Keogh updated the journalistic criticisms he leveled in that book before a small but admiring crowd at a luncheon sponsored by Accuracy in Media, Inc. AIM doesn't think much of advocacy journalism, either.

Keogh, an effective speaker and a respected journalist in his own right, cited media interpretation of the ITT antitrust and influence peddling charges, the 1970 Cambodian "incursion" and this year's Hai-

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phong harbor mining as recent examples of press dis-

"It became painfully obvious," when he got to the White House, that "journalists were losing their credibility." He blamed the trend toward advocacy journalism on "an obsession with the negative; left of center political beliefs; and exaggerations when they suit a particular point of view."

Keogh, perhaps out of deference to local sensitivities, cited The New York Times in several instances for its

reportage on the ITT case. He blasted the TV networks and other publications for their handling of the story, too.

"At the risk of offending some of my more conservative friends in the audience," Keogh remarked at one point, as he recalled the days of the late Sen. Joseph McCarthy, "too many journalists are doing exactly what they criticized him for, 20 years ago."

He said too many journalists went after ITT because "it was big business" and then-Acting Attorney General Richard Kleindienst, because "he was a known conservative."

He recalled the dire editorial predictions of several major newspapers when the White House announced plans to mine the North Vietnam shoreline in May of this year.

Keogh asked "why so many leading journalists so seriously misled the public?" and suggested that it was "because they disagreed with the President's policy and then let their point of view distort their judgments."

Keogh also blasted a familiar target in current journalism, the "negative news" syndrome. He cited

one newspaper's treatment of a story in July from the Civil Service Commission claiming a major increase in minority job upgrading in the government.

"This was a heartening development," said Keogh. "It showed that this is still a land of opportunity."

Nevertheless, he said, because of the media's belief that "this administration is not doing anything to help minorities," one major newspaper buried the CSC item in a two-inch story on "page 21 of its second Sunday section."

"If one dissident civil service employee had instead showed up outside the White House with a sign complaining about minority hiring in the government, he'd have been on the national networks that night," he said. "It is this kind of news balance that bothers me."