

Capital Paper Breaks Budget Embargo; Move Draws White House Sanctions

NYTimes FEB 4 1975

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 3—

President Ford's press secretary imposed sanctions against The Washington Star-News today after that newspaper printed details of Mr. Ford's budget about two hours before the noon release time set by the White House.

"As a consequence," Ron Nessen, the press secretary, said in a statement, The Star-News will not receive an advance copy of the President's Economic Message, which will go to Congress tomorrow noon, and the newspaper will not be allowed to attend an advance briefing on the message tomorrow morning.

"In addition, Fred Barnes of The Washington Star-News, who was scheduled to ask a question at the President's news conference in Atlanta tomorrow, will not be allowed to ask his question," Mr. Nessen's statement said.

For that news conference, White House reporters have signed up in advance to ask questions, which will be alternated with questions from local reporters.

James G. Bellows, editor of The Star-News, said that the White House action "seems childish to us," he added, "As far as we are concerned, the embargo was lifted when President Ford went on television Saturday with the important budget figures."

Other Reactions Recalled

This was the first public White House retaliation against a news organization since Mr. Ford took office, although previous Presidents and their staffs have taken such action.

After the 1972 election, for example, The Star-News was favored over The Washington Post by the staff of President Nixon in disclosures of changes in the Administration, and for a time The Post was excluded from the list of reporters covering White House social events.

In 1962, President Kennedy banned copies of The New York Herald Tribune from the White House because of displeasure with that paper.

"News organizations which break a release time are unfair to all their colleagues who wait up to the embargo," Mr. Nessen said in his statement. "If news organizations start ignoring embargoes, we will have an impossible situation in which there will be a race to get into print or on the air first, and everyone will lose."

"In addition, breaking an embargo on a message to Congress puts the President in the position of showing discourtesy to members of the House and Senate, because members read

about the President's message or hear it broadcast before they receive the official copy."

The first edition of The Star-News, which has a circulation of 80,000 out of the newspaper's total afternoon circulation of 400,000, appeared on the newsstands about 10 A.M. with more than two pages of articles on the budget, which was officially submitted to Congress at noon.

As is their custom when a release time is broken by one news organization, wire services such as The Associated Press, United Press International and Reuters, immediately released their budget articles in advance of the noon embargo.

At first, Mr. Nessen said that all wire services and news organizations that had broken the release time would be barred from receiving advance copies of the President's Economic Message and asking questions at the news conference tomorrow.

"The White House is not playing games," he told reporters in the White House press room. He said that if news organizations did not adhere to embargoes, "it will be like a jungle."

But shortly before the President flew to Atlanta this afternoon, Mr. Nessen said that only The Star-News would be penalized, and that he would meet with representatives of the

other news organizations Wednesday to discuss the matter.

Mr. Barnes, the Star-News reporter who will not be allowed to ask his question at Mr. Ford's news conference, was the 22d person on the White House list of questioners and would probably not have had an opportunity to ask his question anyway.

Press Club Reaction

The New York Press Club criticized yesterday Mr. Nessen's announced policy, saying that it threatened to deprive millions of Americans of access to news and governmental information that affected their daily lives, The Associated Press reported.

John Shanahan, chairman of the club's Freedom of the Press Committee, said:

"This is an ominous move by Nessen and a classic case of over-reaction. Everyone in the news business knows that if one party breaks a release time, the information then is considered already in the public domain and therefore all are free to publish it."

"This governmental censure threatens to deprive millions of Americans of access to news of their Government and information upon which they base millions of decisions daily."

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