



# The Regional Reporter

www.rra.org

JUNE-JULY 2002

## *Financial disclosures*

# Reports offer wealth of info on congressional investments

By SAMANTHA YOUNG  
Stephens Media

Ever wonder which stocks your members of Congress are investing in? Do you know how much farmland or vacation property they own? And what is it all worth?

The answers to these questions can be found in the financial disclosure reports lawmakers are required to file each May.

The 2001 reports became public June 15 and can offer some insight to the potential wealth of your delegation. You may discover you cover millionaires or learn that one lawmaker is getting poorer the longer he or she serves in Congress.

At first, the pages of financial holdings and transactions filed by elected officials and political candidates can be quite daunting – we all know most journalists are not known for their mathematical skills or knowledge of the stock market.

But with the help of a calculator – or better yet an Excel spreadsheet – you can

tally the assets listed by lawmakers and their spouses. A little research on the Internet can turn up a wealth of information about the companies in which a lawmaker invests. For example, last year I found a senator who had invested in local radio station and another lawmaker continued to sell off his property to keep financially afloat while in Congress.

On the same asset sheet, lawmakers also must report the range of income they have earned in the past year from their holdings, usually through dividends, interest or rent. This is where I found out how much one of my lawmakers charges to rent out a room in his half-million-dollar Capitol Hill home.

Another page titled “transactions” details the sale and purchase of assets, such as stock trades.

The reports also require lawmakers to list their liabilities, including mortgages on a second home or business, or bank loans. This section of the report is often a good indication of how much debt a lawmaker owes.

**You may discover you cover millionaires or learn that one lawmaker is getting poorer the longer he or she serves in Congress.**

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By MARC HELLER ■ Watertown Daily Times

# "More" key to building RRA

Sometimes I wish I wrote for a bigger newspaper. I even use a little trick sometimes to help get my calls returned faster.

I write for the Watertown Daily Times, a 34,000 circulation paper in northern New York state. But sometimes when I say "New York" and "Times," a secretary will hear what he or she wants to and say, "That was the Times?"

"Yes," I answer. Marc Heller from the Times.

The trick only goes so far. I've found a better, more honest, way to open doors. That's working with RRA. It's true that we haven't sat down with the president of the United States in my five years here. But we've met with administration officials who would never have sat down alone with a smaller paper: the transportation secretary, the agriculture secretary, the head of the Army Corps of Engineers, the top official at the Bureau of Indian Affairs, to name a few.

Every newsmaker is not a huge success; some officials know regional issues better than others. But in each case, we found some answers on local issues that the bigger papers – with all

their access and influence – might never have even asked about. That's a great thing to be able to tell an editor: If I weren't here to ask the secretary that question, no one would because the wire services wouldn't care.

We've written and rewritten a guide to regional reporting that was one of the best tools I had as a starting reporter in Washington, and to which I still refer for refreshers about congressional offices and contacts around town.

Those are some of the nuts and bolts of what the Regional Reporters Association does. As president, I plan not just to keep the machinery in running order but to try to kick it into higher gear. That means more newsmakers, more interviews and more professional events aimed at what regionals do every day.

Our strength, of course, is in numbers. The more we offer, the more regionals will join, and the more who join, the more we can offer, and so on. We've done an especially good job of harvesting membership from the news services in town and should always keep our eyes on those bureaus. They help us maintain a good regional balance – which is one

of those pesky little requirements in our bylaws.

When I joined RRA, we barely used e-mail and the newsletter was on paper only. Gradually, we've taken hold of this not-so-new technology, and I think we're doing a much better job of communicating. But if my experience is typical, we still don't see each other's work very much. So let's think of new ways to share.

As a final note, I'll pass along a little story at risk of embarrassing my fellow regionals.

I was first elected to the board a few years ago after Jennifer Sergent of Scripps Howard News Service asked if I'd be willing to take on a little responsibility. I was honored. So I went to the annual meeting, and when she nominated me for the position, the whole room paused in a collective look of puzzlement.

Marc who? Watertown what?

It was an all-too-familiar situation for a reporter at a very little regional newspaper. So I want to thank my fellow board members and the membership at large for knowing who I am this time around and for trusting me to bring us forward another year.

### MEETING MINUTES

JUNE 10

Present: Jessica Wehrman, Marc Heller, Suzanne Struglinski, Rachel Smolkin, Bart Jansen, Chris Lee, Brett Lieberman, Paul Krawzak, Samantha Young, Angela Greiling, Alan Bjerja, Jeff Miller, Jake Thompson, Jennifer Sergent, Susan Roth, Carl Weiser, Katherine Scott, Lisa Friedman

This was a brief meeting, in which President Friedman bid her adieu to the presidency, Heller broke a water goblet to assert his authority as the new Big Cahuna and also vowed to continue the strength of the Regional Reporters Association, and Greiling Keane reiterated the strength of the

RRA's finances.

Several members ended their tenure on the board, including Roth, Weiser, Sergent and Smolkin; new members include Katherine Scott of Gannett, Bart Jansen of the Portland Press Herald, Paul Krawzak of Copley, Claire Vitucci of the Riverside Press-Enterprise and Stephen Crane of the University of Maryland Capital News Service.

Other members changed jobs: Heller is the new president, Greiling Keane the new vice president and Thompson the new treasurer. Wehrman remains the secretary.

The next meeting was July 15.

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Find us on the Web: [www.rra.org](http://www.rra.org).



## WEB LINK

From the Web Link grab bag, here's where to look for info on labor benefits, where to track those huge paychecks for corporate CEOs, and where to look if they commit suicide after they are indicted....

<http://www.afcio.org/paywatch/index.htm>

This labor-backed site says it "tracks CEO pay for the S&P Super 1500 Index, analyzes new trends and offers tools for action to hold corporations accountable."

[www.govbenefits.gov](http://www.govbenefits.gov)

A site from the Department of Labor designed to help people identify federal programs designed to help them.

<http://www.suicidology.org/media/7.html>

Guidelines for covering suicides.

— JEFF MILLER  
Allentown Morning Call

## RESTIVE REGIONS

**Christine Dorsey**, a longtime RRA member and former president, has left the Stephens Media Washington bureau for a position with the Nature Conservancy. Stephens is looking to fill her position, which involves reporting for a half-dozen papers in the South and Southwest covering farming, oil and gas and American Indian issues.

## RRA annual elections

# Heller takes the helm

By LISA FRIEDMAN  
ANG Newspapers

The Regional Reporters Association has elected Watertown Daily Times correspondent Marc Heller to be the organization's 14th president.

Heller, 34, has been a member of RRA since arriving in Washington in 1997. He previously served as an at-large board member, secretary and vice president.

Before joining the Daily Times' Washington bureau, Heller covered agriculture for the paper in upstate New York, writing about cows, milk and bull semen.

Really.

Bull semen. No joke. In fact, Heller said a recent library search of his articles turned up the subject no fewer than seven times. He also wrote about dung.

So it was an easy transition to covering politics...

A White Plains, N.Y., native, Heller graduated from the State University of New York at Oswego and earned his master's degree at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. He and his wife, Malinda, live in the District of Columbia.

RRA also is pleased to welcome several new members to its board. They include:

■ **Steve Crane**, Washington bureau director for the University of Maryland's Capital News Service. The student-staffed wire service provides more than 600 stories a year from its D.C. and Annapolis, Md., bureaus to several newspapers in the state. Previously, Crane was a deputy metro editor at The Washington Times. He also has worked as a reporter for The Parkersburg (W. Va.) Sentinel and the South Prince George's (Md.) Independent.

■ **Bart Jansen**, Portland Press

Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram. Before joining the Press Herald a year-and-a-half ago, Jansen worked for the Associated Press as a regional reporter covering California and Nevada issues. Earlier he covered Maryland politics for the AP in Baltimore and The Capital newspaper in Annapolis. He also spent two years working for The Times-News in Twin Falls, Idaho, including covering the legislature in Boise.

■ **Paul Krawzac**, Copley News Service. Krawzac has been with Copley's Washington bureau since 2001 and writes for newspapers in Canton, Massillon and Dover-New Philadelphia, Ohio. Previously he worked as a reporter in the news service's Chicago bureau covering politics.

■ **Katherine Scott**, Gannett News Service. Scott has worked for Gannett's Washington bureau since 1999 as a regional reporter covering South Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa. She also covers higher education. Before joining Gannett, Scott worked as a business reporter for the Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel. She also has worked in Venezuela, Puerto Rico and Miami for the Associated Press' Caribbean bureau and as a municipal government reporter for the Sarasota (Fla.) Herald-Tribune.

■ **Claire Vitucci**, Riverside (Calif.) Press-Enterprise. Vitucci joined the Press-Enterprise in 1999, starting as a general assignment reporter before moving to politics. She came to the paper's Washington bureau in September 2001. Previously she worked as a general assignment reporter/editor at the Associated Press in Los Angeles and as a reporter with the Los Angeles Times' Valley Edition. Earlier she worked for The Daily Californian in El Cajon, Calif., and two other dailies in San Diego

See **ELECTIONS** on Page 5

# RRA Web site redesigned and updated

By BRETT LIEBERMAN  
Harrisburg Patriot-News

The Regional Reporters Association has unveiled a newly redesigned Web site at [www.rra.org](http://www.rra.org) six years after originally going online.

Much like the original site, the new one features a simple design aimed at providing regionals with useful information on a quick-loading site without bandwidth-hogging large graphics.

Bill Cable, a part-time Web page designer in Pennsylvania, did the redesign.

The basic content of the site remains the same -- RRA's newsletter; information on upcoming events; information about RRA and how to join; and links to journalism and government Web sites.

New features include the ability to join RRA or pay dues online with a credit card or electronic draft from members' checking accounts, links to members' regional newspapers, examples of good regional stories and a link to RRA's online chat.

Perhaps the most significant change is the online application that allows regional reporters to join or renew their membership without having to mail a check or application.

The site takes advantage of the Billpoint online payment system from online auctioneer eBay. Users will pay no additional fees and will not have to register to join eBay or Billpoint to take advantage of the system.

Members and prospective members can fill out the online application, which sends a form to RRA. Through the Web site, RRA will then e-mail a clickable invoice that takes the user through the process. eBay guarantees the security of credit card payments,



and RRA will never see members' credit card or bank account information.

Because the system is new for RRA, some users may experience glitches as we get used to the process. Members can e-mail [billing@rra.org](mailto:billing@rra.org) with any questions or problems.

RRA has long tried to highlight examples of regional works to offer members ideas and inspiration. The new site's "Featured Story" section aims to make that easier and more accessible. The current selection is by Bill Walsh of the New Orleans Times-Picayune, who wrote about the proposal to privatize Social Security.

Please send us your stories, or those of colleagues you admire! If you have a story to submit, e-mail the story as well as contact information for your newspaper or news service so we can obtain reuse permission at [Webmaster@rra.org](mailto:Webmaster@rra.org) or [President@rra.org](mailto:President@rra.org).

Don't see your newspaper or another regional one that you read regularly on our list? E-mail us at

[Webmaster@rra.org](mailto:Webmaster@rra.org) with the information and we

will add it as soon as possible. Future plans call for organizing the newspapers alphabetically by state

The RRA chat link takes members to the sign-in page for Yahoo! Groups, where they can join the nearly 50 others already signed up for the Regional Reporters Association Group. Group messages arrive by e-mail and can also be found on the site's archives.

Back at the RRA site, there are links to government and journalism sites, including helpful ones such as The Washington Post's "Today in Congress" and The Washington Times' "Washington Daybook."

Instead of providing long lists of sites that frequently become out of date or are readily available elsewhere, the RRA selected a narrow list of links. While the goal is not to recreate other sites, please e-mail [Webmaster@rra.org](mailto:Webmaster@rra.org) if there's a site missing that other regionals may find useful.

# INVESTMENTS

Continued from Page 1

It is important to explain to readers that these reports only hint at a politician's wealth because congressional rules only require individuals to report their assets and liabilities within wide dollar ranges. For example, income from a stock can be reported between \$201 and \$1,000 or \$1 million and \$5 million.

Lawmakers also are not required to list their congressional salaries – \$150,000 this year -- or those of their spouse. They also do not have to report the value of their primary residence.

Other interesting tidbits included in the report are sections where lawmakers must list paid trips and honoraria. My papers often have been interested in those trips to Colorado or Las Vegas for those "conferences" paid for by lobbyists.

The reports are available at the House Legislative Resource Center in the basement of the Cannon building for House members. Senators' reports can be found at the Office of Public Records in Room 232 of the Hart building.

# ELECTIONS

Continued from Page 3

County.

Eight other current RRA board members were re-elected to serve another one-year term as at-large directors. They include: Lisa Friedman of the Oakland Tribune / ANG Newspapers; Brett Lieberman of the Harrisburg (Pa.) Patriot-News; Jessica Wehrman of Scripps Howard News Service; Samantha Young of Stephens Media; Jeff Miller of the Allentown Morning Call; Angela Greiling-Keane of the Small Newspaper Group; and Jake Thompson of the Omaha World-Herald.

Finally, RRA also says goodbye this year to several longtime members. Past presidents Carl Weiser, Jennifer Sergent and Lolita Baldor will be leaving the board, as are longtime members Susan Roth and Rachel Smolkin. Thanks to all of you for all your hard work!

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please fill in the following information and return it with your \$20 dues payment to:  
The Regional Reporters Association, Ben Franklin Station, P.O. Box 254 Washington, DC 20054-0254

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City,State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP code: \_\_\_\_\_

Office Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ email: \_\_\_\_\_

New applicant     Renewal

Please list the publications or stations that you work for, including city and state:

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