

The Regional Reporter

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OCTOBER 2002

September 11

Think national, but act local or national?

By Jake Thompson
Omaha World-Herald

The anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks presented Washington journalists working for regional news organizations with the classic dilemma: am I a local or national reporter?

Do I write the main stories of the anniversary? Look for local angles? Or shun the whole event because it will receive blot-out-the-sun coverage by national news organizations and people are tired of reliving that tragic day anyway?

Generally, the greater the local impact the more Washington reporters dug into anniversary stories.

But many Washington bureau regional reporters whose readers were not intimately linked to the events of September 11 also found ways to connect with the story.

Lolita Baldor, of the New Haven

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President Bush speaks during Sept. 11 ceremonies at the Pentagon. Some regional reporters decided to cover the day's events from a national perspective.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By MARC HELLER ■ Watertown Daily Times

Another evening fades into morning

Another dinosaur of journalism became extinct in September.

For most regional reporters, the rhythm of a morning newspaper is second nature: Get to work at mid-morning and feel the day build until deadline arrives in the early evening. Be prepared for a call from the copy desk after dinner. The news cycle in Washington runs on the assumption of evening deadlines.

But it's not that way for everyone – and wasn't for me until Sept. 30, when the Watertown Daily Times started weekday morning publication after about 140 years as an afternoon paper.

Everyone in journalism knows that evening newspapers have been a dying breed for years. But the Newspaper Association of America tells us that until 2000, there were always more afternoon papers than morning papers in this country. Last year, there were 776 morning papers and 704 afternoon papers. So things aren't as lopsided as many of us might believe.

I asked regionals to send me their thoughts and advice about the switch to morning publication. There are a few bureaus here that still serve PMs, believe it or not.

Of course there were the comments about the relief of not having to get up so early to meet late-morning deadlines. Although my editors preferred stories to be waiting for them when they arrived in the office at 6:30 a.m., it was impossible to avoid occasionally writing on deadline in the morning.

For our first edition, sent to the northern reaches of our circulation area, that meant filing by 9 a.m. The second edition, to the southern area, had an 11 a.m. deadline. First edition was off the presses in time for you to see your mistakes and fix them for the next edition.

Susan Roth at Gannett News Service noted that the newspaper in Honolulu – already tough for deadlines because of the time difference – bucked the trend recently and actually launched an afternoon paper in addition to the morning edition. That means filing for the morning paper, then being ready to revise for the PM when news breaks in the morning.

"I know many of my sources just don't get it when I tell them I need to hear from them by noon or even 2 p.m.," wrote Roth, who has since switched beats to New York morning newspapers.

Jessica Wehrman of Scripps Howard News Service recalled that when she wrote for the Albuquerque Tribune, the lack of an evening deadline allowed the workday to meld into the night. "I'd find myself turning on the computer at 10 p.m., and my day really never ended," she said.

Think about how much news actually occurs in Washington between midnight and 9 a.m. the next morning, and you'll have an idea how much breaking news I got to cover for an afternoon paper. I'd go to the Pentagon briefing at 1 p.m. Tuesday, and my readers wouldn't see the story until 6 p.m. on Wednesday. The only chance at real breaking news was a

vote in the House in the early morning – the Northeast Dairy Compact comes to mind.

On the other hand, PM reporters have an easier time with the State of the Union address, for example. File at night if you want; wait til morning if you have to.

Easier, however, can also mean lazier. I remember talking once with a longtime Washington correspondent who said what a terrible thing it was not to write on deadline because you lose your discipline as a writer.

After less than a week of morning publication, it's also my sense that morning papers are much better planned. In the old days, my editors basically knew a story was coming from Washington if it was there when they came to work. There was little budgeting because there didn't have to be. That's not the case anymore, and the newspaper will be better for it.

I don't know how many RRA members still write for afternoon papers or what RRA can do to help them. But I'm curious to hear your stories.

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Find us on the Web: www.ra.org.



WEB LINK

Web site picks of the month
Click link to visit site

<http://www.fastpolitics.com/>

This links gives you a quick overview of top political stories that day, along with links to tons of other political sources on the Web.

<http://www.continuityofgovernment.org/home.html>

The new effort by the American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution to think about the unthinkable – having to govern the country if terrorists wipe out scores of lawmakers, Cabinet secretaries, etc.

<http://www.sree.net/stories/web.html#sources>

Tips from Columbia J-School professor Sreenath Sreenivasan on Web-surfing techniques for journalists.

- Compiled by Jeff Miller,
Allentown Morning Call

The Senate Library

A quiet getaway with a wealth of U.S. history

By Michael Doyle
McClatchy Newspapers

Take a hide-a-way where your editors will never find you.

Add a complete set of Congressional Records going back to 1789 (when they were called the Annals of Congress), all just sitting there on open shelves waiting to be plucked for story ideas. Toss in free copy machines, a selection of political reference books that's to die for, and flavor with the friendliest of staff members.

What you've got is the Senate Library. For my taste, it's one of the best regional reporter tools in town; and, from what I can see, it's certainly among the least appreciated.

The library once commanded a fantastic room on the third floor of the Capitol, near the Radio and TV Gallery. No more, alas; now, most of the staff and collection have been relocated to Russell B-15. Coming from the Capitol via the Subway, simply turn right at the first hallway. The library is on the right side, about 50 yards down.

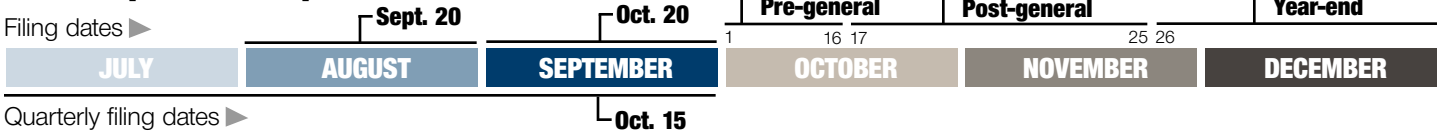
In fact, you don't even have to visit personally to make use of the library. The library staff is very responsive to questions from credentialed reporters; call 224-7106, identify yourself and ask your question. They will track down obscure information, old Congressional Research Service reports and more and will when possible fax you their findings.

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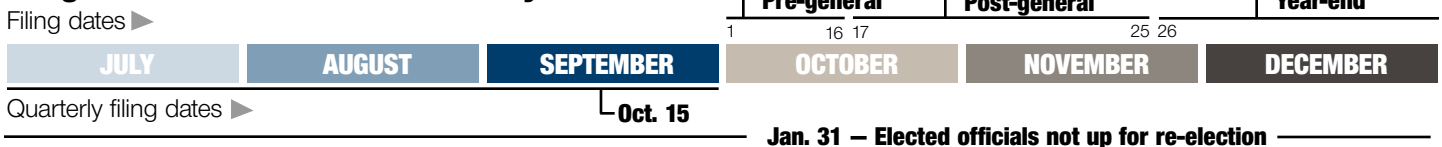
Upcoming Federal Election Committee filing dates to keep handy

How to read this chart: **Aug. 20** — Date of report's filing
 JULY — Period covered by report

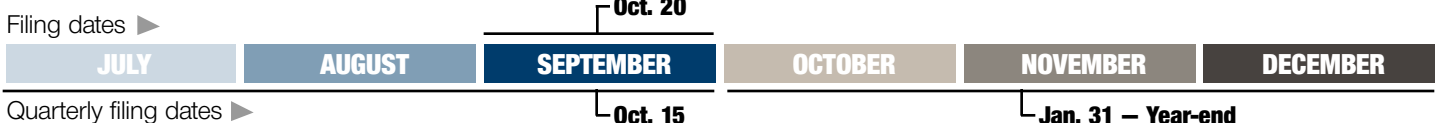
Political parties and political action committees



Congressional officials in election cycle



Presidential committees





RESTIVE REGIONS

Gannett News Service has reshuffled its regional beats, giving about half its reporters new assignments. Here's the lineup:

Carl Weiser now covers Cincinnati while **Ellyn Ferguson** has Oregon and Washington. **Katherine Hutt Scott** covers Michigan and Connecticut while **Erin Kelly** has added Delaware and Maryland. **Maureen Groppe** has added Rockford, Ill. while **Greg Wright** now has Chambersburg, Pa. **Mike Madden** covers South Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa while **Susan Roth** has western New York. **Derrick DePledge** has Hawaii, Guam and Utah.

In non-Gannett moves, **Steve Piacente**, Washington correspondent for the Charleston, S.C., Post-Courier for 13 years, is now speechwriter for Stephen Perry, administrator of the General Services Administration. Piacente left the Post-Courier when it closed its D.C. bureau. The newspaper's action prompted him to write a story about declining coverage of Washington in the September-October Columbia Journalism Review.

- Compiled by Paul Krawzak,
Copley News Service

9/11

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Register's Washington bureau, had no trouble finding a link to the event. More than 150 families in Connecticut were affected by the terrorist attacks, prompting her paper to run a week-long series leading up to 9/11 and to produce a special supplement on the anniversary.

Baldor wrote three stories. One of them a profile of a woman from their area who has gotten involved in the Skyscraper Safety Campaign and helped get a bill passed. Her husband died in one of the World Trade Center towers and the story focused on how her life had changed in the last year.

A second piece centered on how civil liberties have been affected since the Justice Department's crackdown. Baldor was able to use the tale of a Connecticut man who was detained and eventually released as her local hook into the national story.

The third article looked at the federal government's response to the attacks, a story that grew naturally out of Connecticut Democratic Sen. Joseph Lieberman's bill to create a federal department of homeland security.

Finally, Baldor also wrote about a Lieberman aide who was at the Pentagon on September 11 and received a medal for pulling two people out of the building. Like many other reporters in Washington that day, she also covered the Pentagon anniversary memorial service.

The Hartford Courant sent a reporter to the Pentagon ceremony as well.

David Lightman wrote an 80-inch story about how the tragedy had affected Bush's presidency. Another reporter wrote the story of an army ranger who was on temporary assignment at the Pentagon on the fateful

day.

The morning of the anniversary, Lightman wrote a story looking forward to Bush's speech the following day at the United Nations. The bureau also has followed developments in the anthrax cases because a woman from Connecticut was the first to die from anthrax poisoning.

"You don't have to look for phony angles," Lightman said.

Even newspapers geographically far from the tragedies of September 11 found angles into the anniversary story.

The Buffalo News' Washington bureau took on the main stories of the day, with bureau chief Douglas Turner writing about the Pentagon ceremony and Jerry Zremski traveling to Ground Zero in New York

City to write about the ceremony there. Like a number of regional reporters, Turner also wrote a story beforehand about how the attacks affected George W. Bush's presidency and Congress.

Yet even newspapers geographically far from the tragedies of September 11 found angles into the anniversary story. For the Denver Post it came in the form of a pony-tailed, Harley-riding, Native American senator.

On September 11, 2002, Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell did something few other dark-suited senators would do – he hopped on his bike, rode up the Baltimore-Washington Parkway and met 140 motorcyclists who had ridden across the country from California and escorted them into Washington. That gave the Post's Washington bureau a unique local story to send back home.

In addition, Bureau Chief Bill McAllister covered the ceremony at the Pentagon, another bureau reporter was sent to Pennsylvania for the event at the crash site of Flight 93 and a

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9/11

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third bureau reporter went to the National Cathedral and the Mall to write about the mood of people in Washington.

McAllister noted that another reporter in his office, Bill Hilburg who works for the L.A. Daily News wrote nothing on the anniversary because editors were concerned about overkill.

At the Columbus Dispatch's two-person Washington office, Bureau Chief Jonathan Riskind worked on a preview package that examined how quickly the bipartisan goodwill of last year on Capitol Hill dissolved back into partisan rancor, with some notable exceptions.

He wrote a story about government secrets and on September 11 he wrote a wrap-up story from Washington that included President Bush's address, while his colleague Jack Torry covered the Pentagon ceremony.

Small Washington bureaus have to try to pick their spots on big events and try to help the paper back home, Riskind said.

Larry Lipman of the Palm Beach Post, had a natural local story as the anniversary approached: the rise of Sen. Bob Graham.

Once a mid-crowd Democratic senator and former governor, Graham was thrust into the limelight since 9/11 as chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. Lipman wrote about that and how, through Graham's more than 80 nationally

televised appearances on network news shows, he has become "Larry King's new best friend."

For Steve Tetreault of the Stephens Media Group Washington bureau, the anniversary presented a challenge. The organization has papers in Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Hawaii, North Carolina and Tennessee, so the bureau decided not to go overboard and instead wrote a number of short

pieces on the anniversary, including finding local people who worked at the Pentagon.

Tetreault said that in this instance the Pentagon public affairs office was fairly helpful in getting local people for the bureau to interview, a trend all could hope might continue.

In our bureau of the Omaha World-Herald my colleague Matt

Kelley and I did both national and local stories. Before 9/11 we wrote about the impact on Bush's presidency, worries in Congress about war with Iraq and what senators and ordinary staffers remember about September 11. I wrote a piece about the Pentagon renovation.

On September 11, Kelley covered the Pentagon ceremony and I went to Ground Zero to tag along with two families who flew out from Nebraska to try to find some closure in the pit where once stood two 110-foot towers that held a brother and a sister. No remains have been found.

Small Washington bureaus have to try to pick their spots on big events and try to help the paper back home.

– Jonathan Riskind
Columbus Dispatch
bureau chief

MEETING MINUTES

OCTOBER 7

Present: Marc Heller, Samantha Young, Angela Greiling, Lisa Friedman, Jessica Wehrman, Katherine Scott, Jake Thompson

Heller launched the meeting by asking the board whether Jim Sergeant's contract to design the newsletter should be retroactive. Friedman suggested the board make the contract run from June to June – the Regional Reporters

Association's version of a year. Heller and the board informally agreed, then Heller said he was waiting to get the contract from attorney Kevin Goldberg.

He then asked Scott about printing the newsletter. The board plans to print up about 50 newsletters and distribute them at the press club and both press galleries on Capitol Hill. Crane will print out the PDF copies. The board decided to make the print-ups for a few months as a recruiting tool, and will include a story in the newsletter about the fact that it's being used as a recruiting tool.

Discussion on the survey was tabled.

Greiling said she will work on a steel newsmaker for after the election.

Scott said the earliest she can get Sen. Tom Daschle for a newsmaker would be next year.

Friedman said the IRE wanted the RRA membership list to recruit for an upcoming conference. Board members agreed they would send a message about the IRE conference on their listserv. They agreed they did not want to give out information on membership.

The next meeting is Nov. 11.

Join the Regional Reporters Association's listserve today!

Regionals can sign up by going to:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/regionalreporters>

or just click here

LIBRARY

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Visiting in person is even more fruitful. It is open from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., or as late as the Senate is in session.

The Congressional Record collection is a jewel; of all such collections in Washington that I know of, it is by far the easiest to access. I've used volumes going back to the 19th century, tracking down debate and reports on old national parks, Western water projects, child labor in Great Depression and a whole lot more.

The Clerk of the House and Secretary of the Senate reports are conveniently located here; you can, for instance, pull straight from the shelves the Senate reports listing staff members and salaries and much more going back to 1963. All of the House and Senate reports can be quickly retrieved by the staff.

The staff has compiled reading files on many topics that are always useful to check for background. For instance,

when I was preparing a piece on congressional marriages, I asked the library staff if they had anything; they did, and the old clippings from the 1970s and earlier provided good historical context for my story.

It's really a disservice to try to enumerate the holdings; the basic rule, I'd say, is that if it deals with politics, the Senate Library has it. For instance, they have books listing election statistics and voting studies going back into the early 20th century. I can use these, say, to find out that Fresno County in California voted for Republican Herbert Hoover by a 55 to 36 percent margin in the 1928 presidential election. Likewise, they have congressional district atlases that enable you to track the changing shape of districts.

And I'm serious about the hide-a-way part, too. The library has a decent magazine collection, for those moments when a little escape is needed.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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New applicant Renewal

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

