



THE NEWSGUILD – CWA

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January 10, 2018

Vincent E. Price, President
Office of the President, Duke University
207 Allen Building
Box 90001
Durham, NC 27708

Dear Mr. Price:

I am writing to you as a Vice President of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and as President of The NewsGuild-CWA (TNG-CWA).

In September 2017, Professor Bill Adair, the Director of the DeWitt Wallace Center for Media & Democracy, addressed the critical role played by the media in the support of American democracy in his speech for First Amendment Day:

The media in our country plays a vital role to hold power accountable – to dig into politicians' conflicts of interest, expose corruption and fact-check their speeches.

Prof. Adair's comments fall squarely within the Duke University mission statement to provide a "superior liberal education" to, among other things, "promote an intellectual environment built on a commitment to free and open inquiry."

Given the commitment by Duke University to political accountability and free inquiry, I must alert you to my organization's concerns about the business conduct of Alden Global Capital, a New York-based hedge fund whose president, Mr. Heath Freeman (Duke Class of 2002), is a donor to Duke.

Alden Global Capital owns Digital First Media (DFM), the second largest newspaper company by circulation in the United States. DFM includes daily newspapers in markets across the United States, including the San Jose Mercury News, The Denver Post, and the St. Paul Pioneer Press. In the past five years, Alden has imposed steep and extensive cuts on DFM in each of the markets it serves. In the last two years alone, it has reduced staffing at a group of its newspapers by roughly 40 percent. It has sold most of the newspapers' real estate and printing presses. Instead of creating wealth for all stakeholders, Alden has harvested the assets of DFM and undercut news coverage of critical importance to communities across the country.

The NewsGuild's campaign at DFM is designed to alert community leaders that Alden Global Capital is taking these newspapers in the wrong direction. Alden's practices go far beyond the belt-tightening seen at other newspapers. Our research shows Alden has been cutting DFM's news workers at twice the rate of other national chains. The result is drastically diminished news coverage in communities across America.

Martha Waggoner
Chairperson

Bernard Lunzer
President

Marian Needham
Executive Vice President

Vice Presidents: John Hill, Sheila Lindsay, Kevin Flowers, Michael Cabanatuan
Eric Russ, Jeff Gordon, Scott Edmonds



The Freeman family made a significant donation in 1999 to fund the Freeman Center. It also funds the continuing operations of the Freeman Family Program Fund. On behalf of the NewsGuild, I want to express my concern that your continuing receipt of the Freeman donation conflicts with Duke's avowed mission – within the university, the Sanford School of Public Policy, and the Wallace Center for Media & Democracy.

I ask that you contact Heath Freeman and deliver the message that asset-stripping at DFM's newspapers, which remain profitable, is weakening American news collection and disserving American democracy. Further cost-cutting will weaken the reporting of news, which remains crucial to keeping private concentrations of wealth and elected officials accountable to the public.

On behalf of my organization, I respectfully request a meeting with you to discuss the implications of the university's continued cooperation with Mr. Freeman.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bernie Lunzer", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bernie Lunzer
NewsGuild president

cc: Prof. Bill Adair
Rebecca Simons, Director for Jewish Life at Duke
Likhitha Butchireddygari, Editor, *Duke Chronicle*