



NORTHERN ILLINOIS NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION



If you went to a gas station, and they offered you two pricing plans – Plan A, in which you paid for your gas, or Plan B, in which you got exactly the same gas for free – you would have to have the economic IQ of a rutabaga to choose Plan A.



*Dave Barry  
on the newspaper  
industry*

### 'DIGITAL INK' BLOG

[www.ninaonline.org](http://www.ninaonline.org)

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Route to:

- \_\_\_ Publisher  
\_\_\_ Managing Ed.  
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# Redistricting: A primer for journalists

*April 15 conference will help you help your readers*

How does legislative redistricting work? How does it impact your community? And how can journalists monitor and question the process, and then involve their readers in the conversation?

With the redistricting process affecting all of Illinois in 2011, the Northern Illinois Newspaper Association is working with the Citizen Advocacy Center to help journalists learn about the process and how to explain to readers why they should care.

Redistricting will be the focus of NINA's Spring Conference April 15 at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. This important issue will help shape communities for the next decade.

"Redistricting might seem like government gibberish, but it's going to determine the kind of elected representation your community will receive," said Wally Haas, NINA president. "Journalists need to understand this process and help educate their readers. It will be well worth your time to attend the conference."

The morning's main speaker is slated to be Terry Pastika, executive director and

### NINA Spring Conference

**Date:** Friday, April 15, 2011

**Schedule:**

8:45-9 a.m. Check-in  
9 a.m. - noon Program

**Where:** Blackhawk Annex, lower floor of Holmes Student Center, NIU-DeKalb. For a map, see [www.ninaonline.org](http://www.ninaonline.org).

**Cost:** \$15. Includes light breakfast.

**Parking:** Please park in the NIU visitor lot, off Lincoln Highway and Carroll Avenue. Cost is \$5.

**To register:** Contact Jim Killam, 815-753-4239 / [jkillam@niu.edu](mailto:jkillam@niu.edu). Or, register online at [www.ninaonline.org](http://www.ninaonline.org). Registration deadline is April 7. Payment may be made at the door.

community lawyer for the Citizen Advocacy Center, based in Elmhurst. Pastika last spoke to NINA journalists in 2010 at a session about Illinois' new Freedom of Information law.

[www.citizenadvocacycenter.org](http://www.citizenadvocacycenter.org)



JASON AKST PHOTO

**Roger Ruthhart (left), managing editor of the Rock Island Argus / Moline Dispatch, accepts the James Copley Award from Andre Salles of the (Aurora) Beacon News. The award, given Oct. 20, goes to the sweepstakes winner among daily newspapers in NINA's annual contest. See the full list of winners at [www.ninaonline.org](http://www.ninaonline.org).**

**Deborah Nelson, Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter and editor who now teaches at the University of Maryland, told NINA journalists Oct. 22 that local newspapers can serve as watchdogs of federal government by focusing on issues and agencies that impact their communities. Nelson is an NIU alumna.**



JASON AKST PHOTO

## Financial woes can't obscure reasons we became journalists

Remember why you first became a journalist? For some of us it was because we loved to write, or we loved to read or we loved working with words or because we believed stories that appeared in a daily newspaper could make a difference in people's lives.

We need to remember when we first walked into a newsroom, when we thought we were kings and queens of the information world. Remember your first big story, or remember that first election night when the adrenaline rush of working under deadline pressure gave you a high unlike any other.

We got into this business because we loved it and newspapers will survive because dedicated journalists believe in what they do.

Consider all the options available to a new journalist. There's video, audio, blogging, texting, more ways to deliver information than ever before. We should celebrate that and not dwell on dwindling circulation numbers for our print products. People are reading us in different ways. We still make a difference.

No one knows what 2011 will bring. Early indications are that it won't be pretty. Good journalists are leaving the business because they can no longer be confident

that a paycheck will be there at the end of the week. We just saw another round of furloughs that affect our friends in the Gannett Company. Job security is at an all-time low.

We can't ignore the financial realities that face us, but we can't let them paralyze us either. In 2011 we can resolve to be the best journalists we can be, to serve our readers whether they pick up a print product or access us online. We can learn to use all the tools to inform, entertain and educate.

The Northern Illinois Newspaper Association is here to help journalists no matter their level of experience. We design workshops to help you learn the skills needed to be a 21st century information provider.

What journalists do is important.

By remaining dedicated to our craft, we give people the information they need to go about their lives.

We can't forget that.



2011 NINA President Wally Haas is editorial page editor of the Rockford Register Star. Contact him at [whaas@rstar.com](mailto:whaas@rstar.com).

### BOARD MEMBERS

**Wally Haas, President**

Rockford Register Star  
815-987-1359 / [whaas@rstar.com](mailto:whaas@rstar.com)

**Jason Schaumburg, 1st V.P.**

Daily Chronicle, DeKalb  
815-756-4841 / [jschaumburg@daily-chronicle.com](mailto:jschaumburg@daily-chronicle.com)

**Larry Lough, 2nd V.P.**

Sauk Valley Newspapers  
800-798-4085, x 500 / [lough@svn.com](mailto:lough@svn.com)

**Pete Nenni, Past President**

Lake County Bureau, Daily Herald  
847-680-5510 / [pnenni@dailyherald.com](mailto:pnenni@dailyherald.com)

**Jim Slonoff, Treasurer**

The Hinsdalean  
630-323-4422 / [jslonoff@thehinsdalean.com](mailto:jslonoff@thehinsdalean.com)

**Dirk Johnson, Executive Secretary**

NIU Dept. of Communication  
[dejohnson@niu.edu](mailto:dejohnson@niu.edu)

**Jim Killam,**

**Communications Coordinator**

Northern Star, NIU  
815-753-4239 / [jkillam@niu.edu](mailto:jkillam@niu.edu)

**Jason Akst**

NIU Dept. of Communication  
815-753-7009 / [jakst@niu.edu](mailto:jakst@niu.edu)

**Sharon Boehlefeld**

The Observer, Rockford Diocese  
815-399-4300 / [sboehlefeld@rockforddiocese.org](mailto:sboehlefeld@rockforddiocese.org)

**Lonny Cain**

The Times, Ottawa  
815-431-4041 / [lonnyc@mywebtimes.com](mailto:lonnyc@mywebtimes.com)

**John Etheredge**

Ledger-Sentinel, Oswego  
630-554-8573 / [lsnews@sbgglobal.com](mailto:lsnews@sbgglobal.com)

**Kathy Gresey**

Lake County Journals  
847-231-7522 / [kgresey@nwnewsgroup.com](mailto:kgresey@nwnewsgroup.com)

**Dave Monaghan**

The Herald News, Joliet  
815-439-5302 / [dmonaghan@scn1.com](mailto:dmonaghan@scn1.com)

**Denise Renckens Olaszewski**

The Daily Journal, Kankakee  
815-937-3374 / [drenckens@dailyjournal.com](mailto:drenckens@dailyjournal.com)

**Roger Ruthhart**

The Rock Island Argus  
309-786-6441 / [riroger@qconline.com](mailto:riroger@qconline.com)

**Randy Swikle**

Journalism Education Association  
[randyswikle@comcast.net](mailto:randyswikle@comcast.net)

**Penny Wiegert**

The Observer, Rockford Diocese  
815-399-4300 / [PWiegert@rockforddiocese.org](mailto:PWiegert@rockforddiocese.org)

**Jeff Wisser**

Pioneer Press  
847-486-7451 / [jwisser@pioneerlocal.com](mailto:jwisser@pioneerlocal.com)

*Three board seats are currently open.*

**NIU Departmental Support**

**Gary Burns**

Chair, Communication Department  
815-753-7028 / [gburns@niu.edu](mailto:gburns@niu.edu)

*From our member newspapers*

# Yes, it is the public's business

**By Jay Dickerson**

Like knowing your tax dollars are being spent wisely? You're in the wrong state.

Performance evaluations of all public employees in Illinois are now exempt from public disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) after both the House and the Senate voted to override Gov. Pat Quinn's amendatory veto of House Bill 5154. Quinn's amendatory veto narrowed the exemption to law enforcement personnel.

The Senate voted Dec. 1 to override the governor's veto, making all evaluations of public employees exempt. The House also voted in favor of the override, on Nov. 16.

The Illinois Press Association still believes that the evaluations of all public employees whose salaries are funded entirely by taxpayer dollars should be accessible to the public. Before the override veto, the FOIA stated, "The disclosure of information that bears on the public duties of public employees and officials shall not be considered an invasion of personal privacy."

"The law couldn't be any clearer," said Josh Sharp, director of government relations for the IPA. "Nothing bears more clearly on the public duties of public employees than their performance."

In arguing that all evaluations of public employees should be kept from the light of public scrutiny, the Illinois Municipal League wrote: "Performance reviews are simply not documents that are designed to be distributed to a broad audience ... these reviews are rife with personal and private information that could be harmful to individuals if disclosed."

The Illinois Municipal League also wrote that the Freedom of Information Act "reduces the use of performance evaluations as a tool for the efficient management of communities.

Communities need the ability to communicate honestly and openly with their employees concerning job performance. This need outweighs the need for the public to review routine employment matters."

I disagree. So should you.

I believe that government should be transparent. And so should you.

Claiming something is a personnel issue gives far too wide of an exemption that may be misused. You don't need to look any further than Jo Daviess County for an example.

In Jo Daviess County, several years ago, there was an issue with a county employee in an administrative position. At the time, a number of county employees who worked underneath this administrator shared their concerns with the Gazette. They alleged this administrator was misusing his position, and making

it difficult for other employees to serve the public. He was fostering an environment of distrust. People were concerned about their continued employment.

After learning of the troubles with this employee, the county board did act. The county board gave the administrator a list of goals to accomplish, and ways to improve.

When The Gazette tried to receive the goals through the Freedom of Information Act, the Gazette was denied: the Gazette was told the list of goals was personnel-related, and therefore, exempt to public scrutiny.

A list of goals for a public servant to accomplish, but the public is not allowed to know what those goals are? It doesn't seem right. Taxpayers should be offended that goal-setting is considered a personnel issue.

This was more than just a "routine employment matter," as the Illinois Municipal League might argue. This was about openness, and transparency. This was about a public servant misusing his position.

Only weeks later, this individual was fired by the county board, but not before each county department head spoke to the county board in a closed session. The Gazette also learned that this administrator had a history of difficulties at his previous job in Wisconsin as well, culminating in a physical altercation with an alderman. And Wisconsin does not have the same personnel exemption that Illinois does. Incidentally, a physical altercation with an alderman also should not be exempt from public scrutiny.

I believe taxpayers have the right to know how their tax dollars are being spent. I believe you have the right to know how people paid with those same tax dollars are doing their job—at the very least, if they are meeting their goals.

We live in a state of entitlement, where some public servants feel their actions are above public scrutiny.

We live in a state that has seen four governors in the past 35 years see prison time.

We live in a state where we need transparency, now more than ever. We don't need another level of secrecy.

The public needs to know that an employee paid with tax dollars is doing his or her job effectively. This override took away that right from every taxpayer in the state.



Jay Dickerson is editor of the Galena Gazette, and a former NINA Board member. Contact him at [editor@galgazette.com](mailto:editor@galgazette.com).

## CALENDAR

### Friday, March 18

• NINA Board meeting, 10 a.m., Northern Star office, NIU-DeKalb.

### Friday, April 15

• Spring Conference, 9 a.m., Holmes Student Center, NIUDeKalb (see front page).

### Friday, June 24

• NINA Board meeting, 10 a.m., Northern Star office, NIU-DeKalb.

### Friday, Sept. 9

• NINA Board meeting, 10 a.m., Northern Star office, NIU-DeKalb.

### Thursday, Oct. 20

• Fall Conference and Awards Dinner, NIU-DeKalb.

### Friday, Dec. 2

• NINA Board meeting, 10 a.m., Northern Star office, NIU-DeKalb.

## NIU to name 2011 Illinois Journalist of the Year

Northern Illinois University seeks nominations for the 2011 Illinois Journalist of the Year. Nominations can be submitted via NINA's "Digital Ink" blog: [www.ninaonline.org](http://www.ninaonline.org).

The award is presented annually by the NIU Department of Communication to a person who has made a significant contribution to the mass media or, through them, to the public they serve, either as a result of a single accomplishment during the past year, or through a sustained effort over a longer period of time.

Any journalist employed by an Illinois mass medium, or an Illinois resident associated with a national medium serving the people of Illinois, is eligible to receive the award.

A panel of judges consisting of the chair of the Department of Communication, members of its faculty, and student presidents of appropriate journalism organizations at NIU will consider all nominations and choose the award winner.

Nomination deadline is Feb. 28, 2011. The award will be presented at NIU's 2011 Journalism Banquet in April. A scholarship also will be presented in the recipient's name to a deserving journalism student.

### Recent winners

- **Phil Ponce**, 1998, Chicago Tonight, WTTW-TV
- **Linda Grist Cunningham**, 1999, Rockford Register Star
- **Doug Ray**, 2000, Daily Herald
- **Ken Armstrong and Steve Mills**, 2001, Chicago Tribune
- **John Drury**, 2002, WLS-TV, Chicago
- **Chuck Goudie**, 2003, WLS-TV, Chicago
- **Tim Novak and Steve Warmbir**, 2004, Chicago Sun-Times
- **Jonathan K. Whitney**, 2005, Carroll County Review
- **John Foreman**, 2006, The News Gazette, Champaign
- **Olga Gize Carlisle**, 2007, The Journal Standard, Freeport
- **Scott Strazzante**, 2008, Chicago Tribune
- **Bob Frisk**, 2009, Daily Herald
- **Jodi S. Cohen**, 2010, Chicago Tribune