GOVERNMENT PUBLIC RELATIONS AND THE PRESS: THE MICHIGAN EXECUTIVE BRANCH

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ABSTRACT

GOVERNMENT PUBLIC RELATIONS AND THE PRESS: THE MICHIGAN EXECUTIVE BRANCH

by Gerald James Keir

In recent years, government at all levels has become increasingly image-conscious and interested in public relations. Government press agents are now employed at federal, state, and municipal levels amid discussions of secrecy, managed news, propaganda, and similar issues.

This study was an examination of one aspect of the public relations efforts of the executive branch of the State of Michigan. Attention was focused on those state employes classified by the Civil Service Commission as public information personnel. The goal was to determine what kinds of people were doing government public relations work and to see how effectively they work with the press.

Included in the original sample for the study were thirty-four state employes in the classifications of public information specialist, public information executive, and conservation education executive. They were asked to complete questionnaires describing their educational backgrounds, employment histories, and their opinions about the work they performed. Completed questionnaires were obtained from twenty-nine, or 85.3 per cent of the total.

The responses showed that almost all had some education beyond high school, and that most (62.1 per cent) had received bachelor's degrees. Four of the respondents hold master's degrees. Most had

attended Michigan state universities and has majored in fields which would be considered communication arts--journalism or speech. All but seven of those in the public information classes had some experience with newspapers or radio-television news work before their employment with the state government. All but a few considered this background helpful in their present work, but few said that such experience was essential.

Although Michigan public information employes do more than deal with reporters, they do have constant contact with the newsmen in the Capitol bureaus in Lansing. Interviews with reporters from five Capitol news bureaus led to the conclusion that the public information personnel and the reporters have a generally harmonious working relationship. The state public relations personnel seem to be an accepted part of the job of gathering state government news. Most of the usual newspaper complaints about public relations--the non-news story, propagandizing, inaccessibility of news sources--seem to present no major problems in Lansing. The reporters also agreed that experience with the mass media was useful background for a state public relations man or woman. Knowledge of the working conditions and problems of the newsmen seems to produce a degree of empathy among the state public relations employes.

This descriptive study of public relations in the Michigan executive branch also suggests a number of possibilities for future research: Civil Service procedures, Executive Office publicity, hidden public relations men, the role of the handout, and legislative public relations personnel.

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Despite the fact that untold thousands of written works have been dedicated to the parents of the writer, I must now add one more to the list. It is perhaps trite to say that without them none of what follows would have been possible, but it certainly would have been very, very improbable. For all your help, your son thanks you very much.

Gerald Janes Keir

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GOVERNMENT AND THE PRESS IN THE UNITED STATES

The Twentieth Century, more than any other time in history, has been an image conscious era. Business firms hire thousands of people to help keep a favorable impression before the millions of Americans who determine the patterns on their sales charts. Huge advertising budgets enable competitors to spread their messages throughout the nation in magazines and newspapers, and into millions of television-dominated living rooms.

Even charitable organizations are now big users of billboard space, advertising inches, and television time as Americans are urged to dig deep for the United Fund, Mothers' March on Polio, March of Dimes, and dozens of other funds.

As the media have grown and their power to reach people everywhere has been multiplied, big business and charities have not been the only institutions to see the desirability of keeping a good image before the public. The government itself has, in this century more than ever before, become actively involved in the gathering and presentation of information about itself to the people. In fact, one British student of the American political scene contends that "the employment of information officers by public authorities at all levels of government is one of the

notable developments of the present century."[1]

The increasing participation by public administrators in the flow of information has already and will continue to affect the government-press relationship at all levels--federal, state, and municipal.

When the framers of the United States Constitution added the Bill of Rights to that document, one of the main beneficiaries was the press. The constitutions of the states contain similar provisions for freeing the press from governmental restraint. In Michigan the Constitution guarantees that every person may "freely speak, write, express and publish his views on all subjects," and forbids any law which would "restrain or abridge the liberty of speech or of the press."[2]

Theories of the Government-Press Relationship

Since the days of Milton, the proponents of popular rule have been concerned about the proper role of the press in the plotting of the course of government. The Miltonian view advocated "discussion proceeding freely among all those who wish to speak. . . to facilitate a reasonable consensus."[3] Thomas Jefferson, probably America's most widely-quoted authority on the proper role of the press in the political system, trusted to the "common sense and

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[1]William A. Robson, The Governors and the Governed (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), p. 42.

[2]Michigan, Constitution, Art. I, Sec. 5.

[3]J. Edward Gerald, The Social Responsibility of the Press (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1963), p. 11.

reliable judgment: of the people if they were kept fully-informed about politics and government.[4]

Coupled with this advocacy of free press was the concept that the press ought to act as a counterweight to guard against government overstepping its bounds. That mark of the libertarian theory of the press which distinguishes it from other views is the "right and duty of the press to serve as an extralegal check on government."[5] In a Nieman lecture at Marquette University, Alan Barth of the Washington Post contended that: "In a free society . . . the function of the press is, rather, to oppose the government, to scrutinize its activities and to keep its authority within appropriate bounds."[6]

Inherent in this concept is the idea that the press ought to have more or less free access to the activities and paraphernalia of the government in order to better keep watch over the state. In a government based on popular rule, it is generally agreed that one of the prerequisites for the existence of an informed public opinion is the "free availability of information about public issues and public questions."[7] When such information is kept in the

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[4]Ibid., p. 16.

[5]Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm, Four Theories of the Press (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1956), p. 56.

[6]Alan Barth, "The Press as Censor of Government," Vital Speeches of the Day, XXVIII (March 15, 1962), 341.

[7]V. O. Key, Jr., Public Opinion and American Democracy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p. 13.

open, the characteristic "interplay of opinion and policy" of popular rule is free to occur.[8]

Under the traditional libertarian theory of the press, the government was to play a passive role in the collection and dissemination of information to the public. There was to be no government restraint upon the flow of facts, nor was there to be any assistance by the government to keep the facts flowing. This view, in the mold of the Milton-Locke-Jefferson thesis, was based on an Enlightenment Era suspicion of any encroachment by the government upon the basic rights of the people.[9]

As the role of government expanded, however, so too its relationship with the press was altered. Instead of its former passive role, the state now assumed a more active role in the process of gathering and disseminating information. The new role included such tasks as restriction, regulation, and facilitation.

Under the traditional libertarian system, the state's activities had been an open book, accessible to the press, and reporting the contents to the people in a meaningful way. For those who abused the freedom of the press, the state had recourse in statutes for libel or contempt of court. With the new, expanded role for government, the book was partitioned instead into three distinct sections: (1) some of government is now "secret," records are hidden, proceedings often become executive sessions, (2) some

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[8]Harold D. Lasswell, Democracy through Public Opinion (Menasha, Wis.: Banta, 1941), p. 15.

[9]William A. Hachten, "The Press as Reporter and Critic of Government," Journalism Quarterly, XL (Winter, 1963), 12-14.

remains merely open to the press, just as it was under traditional libertarian theory (this includes public proceedings and many records), (3) some activity is now positively reported on by the government itself.[10]

Because of this new role for the state in deciding which bits of information are to be handled in which way, there have been new dangers introduced into the government-press relationship. Both the secret areas and those areas in which government itself handles newsgathering impose new problems on the press.

One quite obvious danger inherent in such a situation is that of an unwarranted expansion by the government of the area of information considered secret, so that the state assumes an authoritarian control over the flow of ideas.[11] The press's continuing fight for open meeting and open records statues is one aspect of this dilemma. Several news organizations have backed Congressional efforts to reduce the scope of federal secrecy,[12] and Sigma Delta Chi, the professional journalistic society, carries on a constant campaign which has helped to get model "Freedom of Information" laws passed in twenty-eight states since 1953.[13]

Congressional concern over apparently widening secrecy in government has long been evident. In 1946, the Congress passed

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[10]Ibid., p. 16.

[11]Ibid., p. 17.

[12]"Press Backed FoI Bill Passed and Recalled," Editor and Publisher, XCVII (August 1, 1964), 50.

[13]"The FoI Report for '63," Quill, LI (December, 1963), 19.

an Administrative Procedure Act which laid down certain guidelines for the release and withholding of information. The legislation was somewhat vague--it allowed withholding information "in the public interest" or "for good cause shown"--but it did loosen up some agencies and set a precedent for open records. Attempts have been made to further delimit the areas considered secret, notably by United States Senator Edward V. Long, a Missouri Democrat. Thus far, the Long legislation has met with little success.[14]

In addition to controlling news by concealing it, government has added another dimension to the news process by employing an increasing number of public relations personnel. Ostensibly, the goal of these people is to facilitate the gathering and publication of information of value to the public. The added use of these public information personnel has, however, resulted in some cries of alarm from both the press and other sources.

Some have suggested that government preparation of news inevitably leads to reduced access for the press in the administrative halls of government. Because of the ready availability of prepared handouts and instant press releases, reporters may be unable or may simply neglect their traditional role as watchdog on the government. In addition, many feel that direct contact with the people through such means as prepared handouts and televised presidential announcements is an undesirable development which threatens to reduce the role of the press in the flow of information.[15]

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[14]"Press Backed FoI Bill Passed and Recalled," p. 50.

[15]Gideon Seymour, "The Relationship of the Press to Government and to the People," Journalism Quarterly, XIX (March, 1942), 55-57.

The Social Responsibility Theory

If government control of information was frowned upon by the libertarians, it is made even more abhorrent by the emergence of a theory which postulates a positive role for the press in the development of society.

Although the libertarian view of the press espoused the principle of an unfettered flow of information, there was nothing in this concept which established the "people's right to (accurate) information."[16] This element is, however, an important part of a new model for government-press relations which has been called the social responsibility theory. Under this system, the press is seen as having the obligation to: (1) serve the political system by providing an objective platform for informing the people and allowing discussion and debate about public affairs, (2) enlighten the public, (3) serve as a watchdog against government for the individual citizens, and (4) serve the economic system (i.e., through advertising).[17]

In recent years, the Commission on Freedom of the Press has advocated a course for the press which follows closely this social responsibility model. Its recommendations have received much criticism from the press itself, but the standards set forth in the commission's 1947 report are relevant to any discussion of government and the press in modern times. In its 1947 report, the commission

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[16]Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, p. 73.

[17]Ibid., p. 74.

said:[18]

> "Today, our society needs, first, a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning;
>
> Second, a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism;
>
> Third, a means of projecting the opinions and attitudes of the groups in society to one another;
>
> Fourth, a method of presenting and clarifying the goals and values of society; and
>
> Fifth, a way of reaching every member of the society by the currents of information, thought, and feeling which the press supplies."

The commission urged that all levels of government work actively to make information available and to clarify government programs. In a similar statement from the same report, Zechariah Chafee suggests that "a democratic society must have a right positively to foster in the community its own philosophy of life."[19]

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[18]Commission on Freedom of the Press, A Free and Responsible Press (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), pp. 20-21.

[19]Zechariah Chafee, Jr., Government and Mass Communications (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), II, 635.

CHAPTER II

THE GROWTH OF GOVERNMENT PUBLIC RELATIONS

> "The difficulty of government work is that it not only has to be well done, but the people have to be convinced that it is being well done. In other words, there is a necessity for both competence and exposition."[1]--James V. Forrestal, Secretary of Defense, 1947-49.

Just as public relations consciousness has affected all of American business during this century, so has it also crept into the practice of public administration. Those people who handle the everyday business of keeping the government running are being urged more and more to be aware of the possibilities for image-making in contact between the bureaucracy and the citizens.

The New Deal and the Information Explosion

Although public relations in business got off the ground early in this century, many have pointed to the New Deal era as the point at which public administrators first became conscious of the possibility of an active role for government in the flow of information. Although government had always been a participant in the gathering and dissemination of news, the early years of the

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[1]James V. Forrestal, quoted in Walter Millis and E. S. Duffield (eds.), Forrestal Diaries (New York: The Viking Press, 1951), p. 300.

Franklin Roosevelt administration fostered the first administrative lobby in the federal government.[2]

In 1936 a study of the government public information function by the Brookings Institution estimated the annual cost of federal government publicity at one million dollars. They found that public information personnel prepared and distributed in excess of 4,900 news releases each year.[3] By the end of the 1941 fiscal year, the federal government was employing 2,895 full-time public information workers just in those agencies concerned with the peacetime administration of the government. Those bureaus concerned with military and defense activities contributed another 1,500 to the public relations work force.[4]

A study of the then existing federal information agencies in 1942 found that most were fledgling departments which had been created since the late thirties. The Office of Government Reports, including the United States Information Service, was created in 1939 within the Executive Office of the President. Several other public relations units were created as war approached in 1941, including the Office of Facts and Figures in the Civil Defense agency, William Donovan's Office of Coordination of Information, the Office of Coordination of Inter-American Affairs headed by Nelson A. Rockefeller, and the Office of the Director of Censorship, a post filled by former Associated Press executive news director Byron

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[2]John M. Pfiffner and Vance R. Presthus, Public Administration (4th ed. rev,; New York: Ronald Press, 1960), p. 166.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Seymour, p. 55.

Price. Within the armed forces the War Department created a Public Relations Bureau, and the Navy Department formed the Office of Public Relations in 1941.[5]

So, in addition to the numerous public information personnel tucked away in dark corners, the federal government had come to accept publicity activities and information-processing as a normal part of managing the state by the time World War II arrived.

By post-war standards, however, the public relations efforts of the late thirties in Washington seemed a drop in the bucket. In 1948 the Bureau of the Budget estimated that there were 45,000 federal employees either directly or indirectly involved in government publicity and information services. Their salaries exceeded thirteen million dollars annually, and their collective efforts resulted in an output of sixty million pieces of government literature each year.[6]

In 1950 the Hoover Commission reported that one hundred five million dollars in federal funds was being spent annually for publicity efforts, including preparation of copy, printing, mailing, and salaries of personnel. The commission found that 45,778 government employees were then involved in public information and publicity work.[7]

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[5]Fred S. Siebert, "Federal Information Agencies--An Outline," Journalism Quarterly, XIX (March, 1942), 28-33.

[6]Pfiffner and Presthus, p. 166.

[7]U.S., Congressional Record, 81st Cong., 2d Sess., 1950, CLXXXVI, Part 17, A6861-66.

Apparently the change in the role of government which marked the New Deal years was one which provided a tremendous impetus for increasing programs of government information.

Public Relations and Government Services

One of the elements of that change was the transformation of the government from a policeman to a service instrument, a switch which made it important to bring the message of government's activities to all of the people. Programs which affect the day-to-day lives of millions of people also become of interest to the reporters covering government. Especially in the executive branch, the enlargement of the role of government naturally gave rise to an increase in reporter's queries about government programs and their effect on the people. As a natural result, one writer concluded, there arose a need for "expert and informed publicists in government when . . . (it) goes into such fields as social security, fields which concern directly the masses of the people."[8]

Opinions of others on the desirability of a positive role for administrators in the reporting of news are not nearly so clear-cut, however. Views on the question range from "we must have it" to "God forbid," with dozens of shades of meaning between.

The dissemination of information to the public by government agencies can often take the place of even legislative action in many situations. On the federal level, especially, this technique can be and has been useful in securing public support for programs which need such backing to succeed. In times of inflation or

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[8]Seymour, p. 55.

depression, for instance, a barrage of government publicity may be loosed to enlist the public's aid in restoring national economic stability. For instance, in the 1958 recession the federal government strongly urged consumers to keep on buying, especially larger purchases, to stimulate production and halt the downturn. The United States Post Office Zip Code campaign is another example of an attempt to use extensive publicity to achieve administrative goals. Snappy spot television announcements, coupled with painstaking explanations by postmasters, accompanied the introduction of the new procedure.

In more recent times President Lyndon Johnson's well-publicized concern over the unfavorable international balance of payments was followed by a reduction in the amount of overseas travel by Americans. Many other similar programs of government agencies require publicity in the mass media to reach maximum effectiveness. It is in this type of activity that government agencies are most likely to distribute material that is persuasive rather than informative. While legislators are wont to attack what they see as administrative propaganda, most have seen the need for some such activity to induce better public compliance with government programs.[9]

The more vociferous defendants of the use of administrative publicity emphasize the essential part public cooperation plays in keeping governmental operations flowing smoothly. A student of the promotional programs conducted by the New York state government concluded that any "enlightened and informed public

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[9]V. O. Key, Jr., Public Opinion and American Democracy, p. 416.

official" worth his salt must make thorough use of the tools of public relations.[10] Similarly, British political scientist William A. Robson observed:[11]

> A widespread knowledge of the aims and purposes of government is necessary to secure consciousness of consent and popular support . . . Public authorities must come into the market place and tell people simply and clearly what they are going to do and why.

For the most part, there is agreement with the premise that government must make available information about its goals and the means it is employing to reach them. The cultivation of a knowledgeable public opinion is seen as legitimate, but there is not so much agreement on the latitude to be given public agencies in the presentation of factual material. A rider to the 1909 appropriation for the Forest Service, for instance, allowed dissemination of "any information of value to the public," yet forbade the preparation and distribution of press releases and news articles.[12]

Administrative Publicity: The Risks

Even those who advocate increased informational activities for public administrators admit that there are concomitant dangers. First, there is the threat of undue influence on the press so as to preclude the chances of government criticism. Included here is the danger of government management of news so as to counteract

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[10]Bernard Rubin, Public Relations and the Empire State (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1958), p. 11.

[11]Robson, p. 36.

[12]U.S., Statutes at Large, XXXV, Part 1, 259.

publicity of administrative blunders by releasing at the same time a story favorable to the government. Secondly, critics are concerned about a creeping encroachment of propaganda into government publicity, not by direct falsification, but "through the presentation of a partial or incomplete picture of a particular matter."[13]

Others are more concerned about direct attempts at propaganda by government agencies. While agreeing that some government information work is useful, Zechariah Chafee's report to the Commission on Freedom of the Press cautioned that "information can easily become propaganda for a cause, although those who frame it may sincerely believe that their side is best."[14]

The view of Congress seems to be a reflection of the almost contradictory 1909 Forest Service law mentioned earlier. The presentation of facts is a legitimate chore, but the digesting of these same facts into a meaningful news story is seen as overstepping the bounds of proper administrative activity.

Public administrators have also been concerned about the proper limits of publicity by agencies in carrying out public policy. There seem to be three dominant views on the legitimate scope of government publicity activities:[15]

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[13]Robson, p. 44.

[14]Chafee, pp. 762-63.

[15]Leonard D. White, Introduction to the Study of Public Administration (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1955), pp. 201-202.

> 1. Formation of policy is the proper duty of legislative bodies and citizen groups . . . administrative agencies should be considered only as a means of executing policy.
> 2. The agency is like any other group, (and) has the right to explain, defend, and encourage adoption of its program.
> 3. A public agency . . . which is equipped with a large body of expert information . . . should have the widest latitude to seek adoption of its program. (Italics mine.)

In this century, with the ascendancy of the role of the executive branch in American government, the role of the administrative bureau in the formulation of policy has tended toward the second and third of these views.

A 1951 investigation by the House Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Branch concluded that the administrative lobby was the most influential in Washington. United States Representative Forest A. Harness, the Indiana Republican who headed the committee, attacked the use of government publicity to persuade the public and legislators. He claimed that "individual liberty and free institutions cannot long survive when the vast power of the Government may be marshaled against the people to perpetuate a given policy or a particular group of office holders."[16]

In the same report, the administrative interests defended their right to utilize public relations techniques. They pointed out that, in a democracy, both the legislators and the public needed information about government in order to make intelligent decisions. The administrative lobby was only one of many voices seeking the public's attention, it was claimed, and public information work by the state itself was the only way to assure that

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[16]"The Propaganda Activities of Big Government under Scrutiny," Congressional Digest, XXX (May, 1951), 142.

government would not be "captive to the narrow force of private interest."[17]

The philosophical discussions of the desirability of publicity by government are, it seems, not limited to this narrow problem alone. The issue is linked to such other concepts as our system of checks and balances, the separation of powers, and the question of strong versus weak government. Those who oppose in principle the use by government of publicity tools are generally concerned more about the increased role of government in daily life than they are about the increased volume of news handouts.[18]

Congress and Government Publicity

The Congress, ever wary of any trend which threatens to enhance the power of the federal executive, has periodically made raids into the territory of the administrative publicist and attempted to retain as much control as possible over government public relations.

The first Congressional efforts in this area were directed toward keeping legislative control over government printing. This was done by creating the Government Printing Office. This office is supervised by the Joint Committee on Printing, consisting of the chairman and two members of the House Committee on House Administration and a like delegation from the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration.

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[17]Ibid., p. 140.

[18]Robson, p. 45.

After the creation of the Government Printing Office, Congress took steps to insure that this would be the only place they would have to scrutinize. A bill was passed abolishing separate printing operations in government agencies and ruling that "all printing offices in the departments . . . shall be considered a part of the Government Printing Office."[19] Another amendment to the same law stipulated that: "All printing, binding, and blank-book work for Congress, the Executive Office and the Judiciary, and every Executive department, independent office, and establishment of the Government, shall be done at the Government Printing Office."[20]

Executive departments were enjoined to print only matter "necessary for the public business," unless specifically authorized by the Congress to do otherwise. Finally, in 1919, a law was passed prohibiting the publication of any "journal, magazine, periodical or similar publication" without a specific authorization from the Congress.[21]

A decision by the United States Comptroller-General in 1936 put the capstone on the Government Printing Office's control over printing work for the federal government. In answer to a Federal Power Commission request, it was ruled that:[22]

> The permissible field of duplicating work done by Government agencies, as distinguised from printing required

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[19]U.S., 44 United States Code 60.

[20]U.S., 44 United States Code 111.

[21]U.S., 40 Statutes 1270 (March 1, 1919).

[22]U.S., Comptroller-General's Ruling A-74715 of December 12, 1936.

> to be done at the Government Printing Office, is largely limited to the reproduction of typewritten matter which otherwise would be for reproducing by a typewriter.

While the Congress was busy consolidating its control over federal printing, the executive branch was becoming more open in its handling of the public relations function. Because of Congressional distrust of administrative publicity, agencies had been forced to hide those activities under such titles as information consultant or education and information representative. In 1890 the United States Civil Service Commission announced examinations for positions as "editorial clerks and editorial assistants" to write news stories, pamphlets, and reports.[23] This, apparently, slipped by the Congressional gaze.

In 1908, however, the Forest Service attempted to hire some personnel to handle publicity chores and got caught. After suitably irate speechmaking, the Congress slapped down the agency by placing a rider on its 1909 appropriation prohibiting the use of funds for the preparation or publication of any newspaper or magazine article. The provision did not, however, prohibit giving out "facts or official information of value to the public."[24]

It was four years later, however, that Congressional indignation over government publicity really came out in force. United States Representative Frederick Gillett of Massachusetts had come across a Civil Service circular announcing competition for several

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[23]Dick Fitzpatrick, "Public Information Activities of Government Agencies," Public Opinion Quarterly, XI (Winter, 1947), 530.

[24]U.S., Statutes at Large, XXXV, Part 1, 259.

posts as "publicity experts" in the Office of Public Roads of the Department of Agriculture. The bulletin said the job involved "preparation of news matter and securing the publicity of such items." It emphasized the need for men with "wide experience (at least five years) in newspaper work," and extensive personal contacts with reporters and editors to assure publication of news items.[25]

Interrupting debate in the middle of an appropriations bill, Representative Gillett soundly denouced the hiring of experts for "exploiting and advertising" a government agency. He claimed that "anything which requires the knowledge of the public certainly finds its way into the press" without the aid of publicity experts.[26] He therefore proposed an amendment to the 1913 Deficiency Appropriation Act forbidding the use of government funds for the "compensation of any publicity expert."[27] After a short debate which was noticeably devoid of any opposition to the amendment, the Gillett proviso carried on a voice vote.[28]

It has become obvious, however, that the principal effect of this legislation was to outlaw the title of "publicity expert" in the federal government service. It has done little to stem the tide of information officers. editors-in-chief, supervisors of research, and other hidden publicity experts now found in

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[25]U.S., Congressional Record, 63rd Cong., 1st Sess., 1913, L, Part 5, 4409.

[26]Ibid., p. 4411.

[27]Ibid., p. 4409.

[28]Ibid., p. 4411.

almost all available administrative corners in the federal government.[29]

In 1919, the Congress again directed its attention to the matter of administrative publicity, this time focusing on the problem of attempts to influence the opinions of legislators. A statute was passed stipulating that:[30]

> No part of the money appropriated by any act shall, in the absence of express authorization by Congress, be used directly or indirectly to pay for any personal service, advertisement, telegram, telephone, letter, printed or written material, or other device, intended or designed to influence in any manner a member of Congress, to favor or oppose, by vote or otherwise, any legislation or appropriation.

While attempting, in periodic bursts of indignation, to thwart administrative puclicity, the Congress has at the same time given parts of the executive branch a blank check for providing huge quantities of the stuff. This has been done through statutory provisions charging all sorts of agencies with specific informational roles. For instance, the Department of Agriculture is directed "to diffuse among the people of the United States useful information on subjects of agriculture."[31] The Civil Areonautics Board "is empowered to collect and disseminate information relative to civil aeronautics."[32]

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[29]V. O. Key, Jr., Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1952), p. 731.

[30]U.S., 41 Statutes at Large 69.

[31]U.S., 5 United States Code 511.

[32]U.S., 49 United States Code 456.

It would seem that determining the real Congressional sentiments about government publicity is a difficult task. That body has placed its feet firmly at both the pro- and anti-publicity ends of a continuum, hacking away at press releases with one hand and making provision for their increased use with the other.

The States and Government Publicity

Considerations of the current status of American state governments are dominated by one morose theme. Most students of the subject have concluded that the citizens of the several states show a marked disinterest toward state politics. In his authoritative study of American states, V.O. Key, Jr., observed wryly that people were not exactly "boiling with concern about the workings of their state governments." He added:[33]

> In the competition for public interest and attention, the governments of American states come off a poor second-best against the performance of the finished professionals who operate in Washington. The salience of national issues, the magnitude of federal undertakings, and the stature of national leaders, creations of the arts of publicity though they may be, push into the far background the doings of the politicians in Springfield, in Sacramento, in Salem, in Baton Rouge, and in Tallahassee. (Italics mine.)

Key goes on to observe that the lack of citizen interest in state affairs has been a result of certain institutional weaknesses in our state political structures. Malapportionment has given the people legislatures which, with few exceptions, give a handful of rural communities the deciding voice in at least one legislative chamber. This same freakish obstacle to the workings of a popular

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[33] V. O. Key, Jr., American State Politics (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 3.

majority also leads quite frequently to that unique version of the separation of powers which opposes a governor to a recalcitrant or openly hostile legislature. The long ballot, through which many executive department heads are elected, can force a stalemate even within the confines of the executive branch itself.

Although the roots of dissatisfaction with state government lie in great part in the legislative branch--i.e., failure to secure an equitable apportionment--the results of it deeply affect the executive branch as well. A major factor which has aggravated state problems has been the massive influx of people into urban areas in this century. Because the rurally-dominated legislatures have not coped realistically with metropolitan problems, the cities have more and more been turning to Washington for assistance.[34] The politics of the nation began to turn on the urban-national axis and the states found themselves leapfrogged.[35] However, the balance of power may be swinging back somewhat as a result of the "one man, one vote" decisions which began with Baker v. Carr.[36]

The long period of imbalance has, some insist, made the role of the states largely one of administering federal programs, receiving and disbursing funds for localities, and similar tasks.

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[34] Ibid., pp. 5-10.

[35] Martin Landau, "Baker v. Carr and the Ghost of Federalism," Reapportionment, ed. Glendon Schubert (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), pp. 241-48.

[36] Baker et al. v. Carr et al., 369 U.S. 186 (1962). The relevant Michigan reapportionment decisions which follow the same reasoning are Scholle v. Hare, Secretary of State of Michigan, et al. 369 U.S. 429 (1962), and the later state decision, Scholle v. Secretary of State, No. 63, 367 Mich. 176 (1962).

Key observes that, in the context of today's politics, "the work of state government consists in higher degree of the unglamourous chores of administration."[37]

If this contention has even a substantial glimmer of truth, then the electoral decisions made at the state level ought to be more and more linked with the kind of job being done in the executive branch of government. It has been observed that, "even under the most favorable circumstances a sharp discrimination by the public between the rascals and the others is difficult to achieve."[38] Whatever discrimination is present is likely to be a function of the quality of performance as reported in the mass media.

The state of Michigan fits this model nearly perfectly. The dichotomy between the metropolis (Detroit) and outstate is present. Malapportionment has traditionally left the cities underrepresented. Huge urban problems exist, and the state has not made serious efforts to attack them. Until the 1964 reapportionment, the governor had been faced by a constantly hostile legislature dominated by rural districts.

As the task of the state administration increases, more and more public attention is and ought to be focused upon that phase of the government. For years, the state of Michigan has used public information personnel to help tell the government story. Now, there are more employees of the state involved in government

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[37]Key, American State Politics, p. 17.

[38]Ibid., p. 14.

publicity than there are reporters in the Lansing bureaus of all the press outlets which keep staffs in the Capital. This role for the state in newsgathering has, obviously, altered somewhat the relationship between the public administration and the press in Michigan. This study is intended to discover more about this relationship by looking at the men and women who fill the state government posts, and at their relations with the representatives of the press who deal with them.

CHAPTER III

STATE PUBLIC RELATIONS IN MICHIGAN

The administrative handling of government public relations jobs has varied considerably from state to state, with some states attempting to conceal the existence of such activities from prying public and legislative eyes and others being more open about the matter.

Massachusetts, for instance, uses the title of information officer to cover up state public relations activities.[1] On the other hand Ohio attempted for years to avoid any mention of the existence of public relations personnel within the state government. Although the Ohio Civil Service was created in 1913, by 1937 there was no job classification which appeared to have anything remotely to do with public relations, publicity, public information, or any of the familiar cover titles used to conceal these people.[2]

In Michigan the Civil Service Department was created in 1938, and public relations jobs were included in the classified service from the start. However, each agency is allowed two unclassified positions, and these have sometimes been used to quietly

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[1]Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Annual Report of the Director of Civil Service, Dec. 1, 1962 - Nov. 30, 1963.

[2]Ohio, State Civil Service Commission, Civil Service Laws of Ohio, August 1, 1937 (Columbus, Ohio: F. J. Heer Printing Co.).

add an extra publicity man. Some department heads have used these positions to conceal a personal drum-beater. The practice has declined, however, possibly because of the recent reduction in the number of elected department heads.[3]

Michigan Civil Service and Public Relations

When the Michigan civil service system came into being in the fall of 1938, a large bloc of jobs within the Education and Information class was reserved for those personnel involved in publicity work.[4] Unlike many other states, Michigan came right out and called a public relations man a public relations man, a decision which no doubt has led to more criticism of the publicity activities of the state agencies.

A distinguishing characteristic of the early classification of Michigan public relations jobs--one which has largely disappeared--was the proliferation of highly specific job classes. Even in the category of General and Miscellaneous Publicity jobs (class 47,000), a handful of narrowly-defined titles are found. Included here were: state fair publicity executive, aeronautics publicity executive, consumer research executive, and conservation education executive.[5]

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[3]Interview with Otis S. Hardy, Assistant to the Director, Michigan Civil Service Commission, April 28, 1965.

[4]Michigan, Civil Service Department, Official Compensation Schedule, Sept. 1, 1938. The numeric system of the Michigan Civil Service divides all state jobs into nine major areas. One of these major divisions--class 40,000--is the "Education and Information" area. A subgroup of this--class 47,000--contains the "Publicity" jobs.

[5]Ibid.

The next category, Newspaper Publicity (class 47,000), contained only the jobs of journalist I and journalist II.[6] In the Radio Publicity section (class 47,300), the only job listed in 1938 was that of radio publicist I.[7]

The most minute breakdown of job classifications was in the category of Specialized Research. Several of the agencies apparently felt a need for technically-qualified research publicists, and a welter of job titles resulted. Indicative of the abundance of such posts in 1938 are positions for education research publicist, agriculture research publicist, welfare research publicist, and conservation research publicist.[8]

One facinating job which was a part of the state service at its birth in 1938, but which has been lost in the shuffle of classes since, is the post of temperance education representative.[9] Unfortunately, a search of the Civil Service records failed to turn up the job specifications for this interesting position.

Most of the research publicists and other assorted positions of that type fell by the wayside as the Civil Service structure developed, and had disappeared by the later 1940s. Now, there are still a few education consultants and executives remaining in this class, but they have little to do with publicity programs. Conservation, dental health, and public health are the fields which still employ such education personnel, but only the conservation

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

employes have much to do with press relations.

By 1952 only two class titles were left in the public relations area, and there was really only one promotion ladder for people in this field. Those lower on the totem pole--job classes I, II, and III--were called publicists. The higher-level personnel in classes IV through VIa were titled public relations executives.[10]

The changes made in the public relations job structure after 1952 are primarily of interest only to students of semantics. In 1956, the public relations executive title was changed to public information executive.[11] Such a change apparently was designed to make them a little less visible and avoid the odious public relations title. By that time, legislators and others had developed a habit of vociferously censuring these government publicists.[12] In 1961 the Civil Service Commission made the switch complete by making the publicists into public information specialists.[13]

Whether because of increased anonymity or a natural increase in acceptance, state public relations jobs seem to be attracting less unfavorable comment. One veteran of the government public relations business in Lansing commented that attacks in the news media--many reporters took potshots at the state publicists at

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[10]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, Compensation Manual: 1952, pp. 77-78.

[11]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, Compensation Manual: 1956, p. 49.

[12]Interview with Hardy, April 28, 1965.

[13]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, Compensation Manual: 1965, pp. 87-88.

least annually--have occurred with less frequency in recent years.[14]

Public Information in Civil Service Today

As a result of the many changes and deletions made in the Civil Service structure since 1938, the arrangement for public information jobs is much simpler now than it has been through its history. There is now only one job ladder for positions of this type. State public relations jobs and such other titles as journalist and research publicist are now subsumed under the public information heading. At present, the public information jobs in the state service are: public information specialist I, II, and III; public information executive IIIa, IV, IVa, V, Va, VI, and VIa; and conservation education executive IV.[15]

Public Information Specialist I

This job classification is essentially that of a general assignment reporter--collecting information on assigned topics, writing news copy or feature articles, possibly arranging for photographic work, and maintaining files.

This class and all other public information jobs in state service requires a bachelor's degree, but the substitution of two

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[14]Interview with Gordon Hanna, Information Director, Michigan Civil Rights Commission, August 17, 1965.

[15]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, Compensation Manual: 1965, pp. 87-88.

years' experience in writing or publicity work is allowed.[16] This would indicate, according to a Civil Service examiner specializing in these positions, that officials "don't think an awful lot of the degree requirement if two years' experience is an acceptable substitute."[17] Other requirements for the position include an intelligence quotient equal to the college average, knowledge of news and magazine writing techniques, elementary knowledge of layout, and writing ability. For this job level, no experience beyond the bachelor's degree (or the substitute of two years' work) is required.[18] In practice, however, those hired usually do have more than the minimum experience. The salary for this class ranges from $5,387.04 to $6,660.72 annually.[19]

Public Information Specialist II

This class is similar to that of a newspaper reporter. The employe, in theory, at least, acquires the equivalent of a beat to cover within his department. He is given more freedom to

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[16]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, "47004 Public Information Specialist I; 47005 Public Information Specialist II; 47006 Public Information Specialist III," p. 2. (Mimeographed job specifications.) These and other job specifications cited later are available upon request from the Civil Service Commission office in Lansing.

[17]Interview with Jerry L. Stone, Examination Technician, Michigan Civil Service Commission, September 22, 1965.

[18]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, "47004 Public Information Specialist I; 47005 Public Information Specialist II; 47006 Public Information Specialist III," pp. 2-3. (Mimeographed job specifications.)

[19]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, Compensation Manual: 1965, p. 87.

independently write, edit, and release copy, and usually takes responsibility for a particular program or for a segment of a publication.[20]

People at this classification level usually work within substantial publicity operations in the larger departments. The only public information specialist II in charge of a total departmental program works in the Water Resources Commission.[21] Surprisingly, the "Water Wonderland" has only a minimal public information effort in this area.[22] Other people at this job level work in the Traffic Division of the State Highway Department, and in the Public Information Section of the State Police.[23]

This class has a salary range of $6,180.48 to $7,767.36.[24] The public information specialist II class has the same education (or experience substitute) requirement as the lower category. However, one year of writing for publication beyond the degree, or beyond the two years of substitute experience, is required.[25]

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[20]Ibid., p. 1.

[21]Letter from Otis S. Hardy, April 29, 1965.

[22]Interview with Molly M. Boelio, Public Information Specialist, Michigan Water Resources Commission, May 27, 1965.

[23]Letter from Hardy, April 29, 1965.

[24]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, Compensation Manual: 1965, p. 87.

[25]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, "47004 Public Information Specialist I; 47005 Public Information Specialist II; 47006 Public Information Specialist III," p. 2. (Mimeographed job specifications.)

Public Information Specialist III

This job class is a common one found in the public information sections of several state departments. It is the first level at which supervisory functions are usually assigned, and probably corresponds most closely to a copy desk or assistant city editor position on a metropolitan newspaper. Specialist IIIs assign stories to others, handle dummies and make-up for publications, collect information on the success of publicity programs, and often supervise photographic work and duplicating.[26]

These positions are found in the large Education and Information Section of the Department of Conservation, the Office of Health Information of the Department of Health, the Motorist Services and Reports Division of the Highway Department, the Michigan Employment Security Commission, the Department of State, and the Michigan Tourist Council. In addition, the only publicist in the Department of Public Instruction is at this level.[27]

Education (or experience substitute) requirement is the same as for the other specialist levels. A total of three years of full-time experience in writing for publication or broadcast is also required.[28] The annual salary for this position ranges from

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Letter from Hardy, April 29, 1965.

[28] Michigan, Civil Service Commission, "47004 Public Information Specialist I; 47005 Public Information Specialist II; 47006 Public Information Specialist III," p. 2. (Mimeographed job specifications.)

$7,370.64 to $9,437.76.[29]

Employes in the executive classes are either directors of a department public information effort, or act as number two man in the publicity program of a very large agency. And where the specialist classes are primarily concerned with writing copy and preparing releases, the executives handle a broad range of work dealing with "informational, educational, and promotional material concerning the activities of state departments."[30]

Public Information Executive IIIa

This classification is, in theory, for those persons concerned with the use of film in educational programs or to promote departmental activities. These people--there are only three of them in the state service--supervise the preparation of "educational motion pictures or television productions on conservation or recreational subjects."[31]

There are other job classes for those handling the technical end of photography and film production, but this position is for those who plan the overall use of visual material to best complement the total information program. Two of these positions are

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[29]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, Compensation Manual: 1965, p. 87.

[30]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, "47056 Public Information Executive IIIa; 47037 Public Information Executive IV; 47017 Public Information Executive IVa; 47038 Public Information Executive V," p. 1. (Mimeographed job specifications.)

[31]Ibid.

in the Education and Information Section of the Department of Conservation, and the other is in the Agriculture Department.[32]

The executive job levels all have the same requirements for a bachelor's degree (or two years' substitute experience) as do the specialist positions. In addition, a public information executive IIIa is required to have four years of publicity experience.[33] Annual salaries of this class range from $8,038.80 to $10,293.84.[34]

Public Information Executive IV

The IV level public information position is the first wholly supervisory rung on the job ladder. The positions are allocated for the heads of information services in state departments, and these people are now found in the Aeronautics, Health, and State Department publicity divisions.[35] The position has some direct policy-making responsibility, since its occupants cooperate with department heads in planning the general information program and the long-range publicity objectives. The job specifically demands a "knowledge of the press corps assigned to state government." Organizational and public relations knowledge are stressed

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[32]Letter from Hardy, April 29, 1965.

[33]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, "47056 Public Information Executive IIIa; 47037 Public Information Executive IV; 47017 Public Information Executive IVa; 47038 Public Information Executive V," p. 1. (Mimeographed job specifications.)

[34]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, Compensation Manual: 1965, p. 88.

[35]Letter from Hardy, April 29, 1965.

at this level, rather than specific news abilities like writing, copyediting, or graphics.[36]

In addition to the standard education or experience requirement, this position also requires at least four years of experience in publicity, "at least one of which shall have involved the planning of publicity projects."[37] The annual salary range is $8,811.36 to $11,316.96.[38]

Public Information Executive IVa

This job is essentially the same as the position for the IV level, except for the higher rate of pay and the stipulation that its occupant shall be the "head of information services in a large department."[39] The heads of departmental publicity programs in the Civil Rights Commission, Michigan Employment Security Commission, Highway Department, Department of Economic Expansion, and the Department of Mental Health hold this position.[40]

Job requirements are the standard education or experience, plus five years of work in writing and in directing the planning

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[36]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, "47056 Public Information Executive IIIa; 47037 Public Information Executive IV; 47017 Public Information Executive IVa; 47038 Public Information Executive V," p. 1. (Mimeographed job specifications.)

[37]Ibid., p. 2.

[38]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, Compensation Manual: 1965, p. 88.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Letter from Hardy, April 29, 1965.

of publicity programs.[41] The annual salary ranges from $9,813.60 to $12,674.16.[42]

Public Information Executive V

There are only two job slots at this level in the state service, both concerned more and more with the relationship between departmental publicity programs and overall department policy. Those in these positions counsel department officials on special public relations programs, and are concerned with the broad outlines of policy.[43] Filling the V level public information positions are the director of the Public Information Section of the State Police, and the Supervisor of Publications and Information in the Conservation Department.[44]

The position requires at least six years of experience in publicity or promotion work, at least two years of which must have been as director of a publicity program.[45] The annual salary range is from $10,982.88 to $14,135.76.[46]

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[41]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, "47056 Public Information Executive IIIa; 47037 Public Information Executive IV; 47017 Public Information Executive IVa; 47038 Public Information Executive V," p. 2. (Mimeographed job specifications.)

[42]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, Compensation Manual: 1965, p. 88.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Letter from Hardy, April 29, 1965.

[45]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, "47056 Public Information Executive IIIa; 47037 Public Information Executive IV; 47017 Public Information Executive IVa; 47038 Public Information Executive V," p. 2. (Mimeographed job specifications.)

[46]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, Compensation Manual: 1965, p. 88.

Public Information Executive Va

Only one employe in the state service has this job classification, the Chief Information Officer of the Department of Conservation.[47] He directs the work of five other public information personnel, several workers in the graphic arts field, and four department field representatives.

In addition to the bachelor's degree or its experience substitute, the applicant for this job must have had seven years of experience in publicity or promotion work. Other requirements include "knowledge of the planning, organization, and execution of newspaper, television, and radio publicity programs," ability to gauge public reaction to publicity programs, and a "knowledge of legislative relationships with the agency."[48] The salary ranges from a minimum of $12,298.32 to $15,639.12.[49]

Public Information Executive VI

This class is another one-of-a-kind slot which is filled by the director of public information for the Highway Department. He supervises the overall publicity program, as well as the preparation of the dozens of maps, brochures, and tourist guides which are used to answer queries from the public about the State of Michigan and its roads.

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[47]Letter from Hardy, April 29, 1965.

[48]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, "47048 Public Information Executive Va," pp. 1-2. (Mimeographed job specifications.)

[49]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, Compensation Manual: 1965, p. 88.

The job requires seven years of publicity experience, including two years' work directing a publicity program equivalent in responsibility to the public information executive V class in the Civil Service. The degree (or its substitute) requirement remains as well.[50] The salary for this position ranges from a minimum of $13,739.04 to $17,267.76.[51]

Public Information Executive VIa

The highest level post in the public information job ladder is this one, filled by the Assistant to the Director of the Civil Service Commission, Otis S. Hardy. He handles the overall publicity program, and is also in charge of the operation and publicity of the state employes' insurance program.[52]

He is also charged with the task of advising the director and the various division heads on matters of public information and publicity programs.

The position requires the normal education (or experience substitute), and eight years of experience in publicity or promotion work, including at least three years as director of a publicity operation.[53] The salary for this position ranges from a

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[50]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, "47049 Public Information Executive VI," pp. 1-2. (Mimeographed job specifications.)

[51]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, Compensation Manual: 1965, p. 88.

[52]Interview with Hardy, April 29, 1965.

[53]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, "47059 Public Information Executive VIa," p. 1. (Mimeographed job specifications.)

minimum of $16,056.72 to $19,585.44.[54]

Conservation Education Executive IV

Although this position is not wholly involved with public information, some occupants of the job of conservation education executive IV do have quite a bit of contact with the Department of Conservation information program. Those filling the position may be staioned in the departmental headquarters, or in department regional offices in Marquette, Roscommon, or Lansing. According to William Mullendore, chief information officer for the department, these employes work closely with schools or other groups on education and information programs.[55]

They have some involvement with regional information programs, and may work at writing news releases, radio scripts, magazine articles, or other information/education materials. Other related information tasks also include giving lectures, handling film distribution, and making transcripts for radio programs.[56]

The job requires a bachelor's degree in education or in some field of conservation, plus either one year as a conservation education consultant, or three years' work in a professional field of conservation. Also recommended are a knowledge of public

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[54]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, Compensation Manual: 1965, p. 88.

[55]Interview with William Mullendore, Chief Information Officer, Department of Conservation, January 12, 1966.

[56]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, "47257 Conservation Education Executive IV; 47247 Conservation Education Executive IVa," p. 1. (Mimeographed job specifications.)

relations, ability to use publicity media, and knowledge of writing techniques.[57] The pay range for this position is from $8,811.36 to $11,316.96.[58]

Selection of Public Information Personnel

Civil Service opinions about the most desirable way of selecting public information personnel are undergoing a change. In the past, a written test was usually the basis for hiring, especially for the lower classes. This was sometimes combined with an interview conducted by a three-man board from the news or public relations field. Often, however, the test and an evaluation of the applicant's education and experience by a Civil Service examiner were the only factors taken into account.[59]

When used, the written test combined a number of standard testing series which were designed to demonstrate the applicant's fitness for the job's specifications. One of the last such tests, given for public information specialist posts in 1963, had sections on ability to organize material logically, use of English, public relations techniques, vocabulary, and a number of other areas. The tests for the specialist I and II classes were shorter than that for the III level, and covered less material.[60]

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[57] Ibid., pp. 2-3.

[58] Michigan, Civil Service Commission, Compensation Manual: 1965, p. 87.

[59] Interview with Stone, September 22, 1965.

[60] Michigan, Civil Service Commission, Examination Outline 50730C PX for examination given March 10, 1962 for positions of Public Information Specialist I, II, and III. (Typewritten on a prepared form.)

Recently, Civil Service officials have been turning more and more to the exclusive use of the interview in selecting public information personnel. Officials have expressed doubts that a supposedly objective written test, usually composed entirely of multiple-choice items, can validly determine an applicant's fitness for such a position. The substitution of such tasks as writing news stories is unsatisfactory, since it would require a subjective evaluation and, therefore, be subject to appeal by any rejected applicant.[61]

Instead, examiners are relying on experts in the field to evaluate each applicant on the basis of his educational and professional experience and an interview. The job applicants are graded on overall personal fitness (twenty-five per cent), knowledge and abilities (twenty-five per cent), and evaluation of education and experience (twenty-five per cent) by the interview board. The remaining twenty-five per cent of the score is based on an independent evaluation of experience and education made by the Civil Service prior to the interview.[62]

Typical of the interviewers used by the Civil Service is a 1964 oral appraisal board which included three men with long experience in public relations work. They were Lowell Treaster, director of information services for Michigan State University; Donald Gillard, director of public relations for Michigan Bell Telephone Company in Detroit; and Jack I. Green, former Associated

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[61]Interview with Stone, September 22, 1965.

[62]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, A Manual of Instructions for Oral Appraisal Board Members (May, 1963), p. 12.

Press newsman who is now director of public affairs for Associated Petroleum Industries of Michigan in Lansing.[63] Civil Service officials consider that boards made up of such people are able to make more valid decisions than those made on the basis of written tests.[64]

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[63]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, Civil Service in Michigan State Government: 1964 Annual Report, pp. 29-30.

[64]Interview with Stone, September 22, 1965.

CHAPTER IV

MICHIGAN PUBLIC INFORMATION PERSONNEL

In order to gather information about the people interposed between the press and the Michigan state government, questionnaires were mailed in October, 1965, to the thirty-four persons identified by the Civil Service Commission as the state public information personnel.[1] The questionnaire and the letter which accompanied it are reproduced in Appendix A. Included in this mailing were all of the public information specialists, public information executives, and conservation education executives.

After repeated call-backs and a second mailing of questionnaires to those failing to respond, twenty-nine completed questionnaires were obtained, a return of 85.3 per cent. As indicated in Table 1, more than 80 per cent of those in each job class responded, including a return of 100 per cent from the conservation group.

Because the respondents make up such a high percentage of the total public information population in Michigan, any significant trends noted in this group may be considered accurate for the whole population. Of course, the five non-respondents may differ in some ways from the group of respondents, but they still

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[1]Letter from Hardy, April 29, 1965.

TABLE 1.--Respondents to Personal History Questionnaire Sent to Michigan Public Information Personnel

Civil Service Classification	State Total	Number Responding
Executives:		
Public Information	15	13
Conservation Education	4	4
Specialists:		
Public Information	15	12
Total	34	29

represent less than 15 per cent of the total. We do know, at least, that the non-respondents are not clustered at any one job level--two of them are public information executives, three are specialists.

Length of State Service

Among those responding, length of experience with the state has no significant relationship to position on the public information job ladder. As indicated in Table 2, employes in the

TABLE 2.--Length of State Government Employment of Michigan Public Information Personnel

Civil Service Classification	N	Maximum Service (years)	Minimum Service (years)	Mean Service (years)
Executives:				
Public Information	13	25	1	9.7
Conservation Education	4	30	18	25.5
Specialists:				
Public Information	12	37	1	8.8
Total	29	37	1	11.5

public information executive classes do have an adge over the specialists in average length of service, but the difference is a slight one--9.7 years to 8.8.

In this dimension, as in many other respects demonstrated later in the study, the conservation education group is atypical of the overall public information population. No conservation education executive has less than eighteen years of service with the state, and their average length of state service is more than twenty-five years.

The data on the public information workers would seem to confirm an impression gained from talking with Civil Service personnel and state publicists that the job ladder in this field often is less than a real advancement ladder in practice. One respondent in a high-level public information position in Lansing commented:[2]

> Progress up the promotional ladder in the state service appears to be very slow. The individual who can use a solid work experience background to obtain a high-level government position probably will achieve a higher classification than one who comes up through the ranks of Civil Service.

The speaker here has had only a short period of service with the state government, and he did exactly as he recommends above, so he might be considered a less-than-objective source. With extensive background in the newspaper field, however, he did obtain a very high state job classification. In addition, he has

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[2]This and other comments excerpted from responses to the personal history questionnaires will not be attributed to individuals. The information was obtained with the agreement that it would be used to determine overall trands and prevailing atitudes, and it was promised that comments and information would be used anonymously.

worked as a reporter in Lansing, and has had quite a bit of contact with the workings of state government.

Job Experience with the State

Except for the deviant group of conservation education executives, most of the persons responding to the survey indicated that all of their state service had been in the public information field. As indicated in Table 3, the specialists were more

TABLE 3.--Occurrence of Non-Public Information Jobs in Employment Histories of Michigan Public Information Personnel

Civil Service Classification	All Previous State Service in Public Information	Some Previous State Service in Non-P.I. Capacity	Total
Executives:			
Public Information	10	3	13
Conservation Educ.	0	4	4
Specialists:			
Public Information	7	5	12
Total	17	12	29

likely to have done some non-publicity work--five of twelve respondents had done so--than were the public information executives. Only three of the executives had ventured outside of this field, and none had really spent much time in non-public information work. One had been outside of public information work for only two of his ten years with the state, another for just one of eight years.

The non-public information jobs performed by the respondents were scattered among many areas. One of the top executives had spent his first two years with the state as an administrative

officer with the Michigan Turnpike Authority. Another, who earned a master's degree in public health while employed by the Health Department, spent time developing community health training programs under the Manpower Development Act. When the training programs were discontinued in 1964, he returned to public information work. Another executive did work in personnel management, and also did special studies for his department.

Among the specialists, some of the jobs held outside of the public information field were governor's aide, lease executive, insurance regulator, highway property representative, office manager in the Records and Reports section of the Highway Department, and labor dispute supervisor. Two respondents also reported working as clerks. In most cases here, as in the executive group, the jobs represented only short interruptions in a career predominantly concerned with public information.

The four conservation education executives had all had some non-publicity experience with the Conservation Department before assuming their present positions. Three of the four worked as conservation officers, and two had experience as game biologists. Other assignments included forest fire officer, game farm superintendent, and district supervisor for fire and law.

As Table 4 shows, there is not a great deal of mobility between agencies for state public information personnel. Twenty-two of the twenty-nine respondents, more than 75 per cent, have remained with the agency they started with.

TABLE 4.--Interdepartmental Mobility of Michigan Public Information Personnel

Civil Service Classification	State Work Experience		Total
	All With One Agency	More Than One Agency	
Executives:			
Public Information	10	3	13
Conservation Education	4	0	4
Specialists:			
Public Information	8	4	12
Total	22	7	29

Education

As indicated in Table 5, Michigan's public information personnel are a well-educated group. Of course, all of the respondents in the survey have completed high school, since it is a

TABLE 5.--Education Backgrounds of Michigan Public Information Personnel

Civil Service Classification	H.S. Only	Some College	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Total
Executives:					
Public Information	1	5	4	3	13
Conservation Educ.	0	1	2	1	4
Specialists:					
Public Information	2	2	8	0	12
Total	3	8	14	4	29

prerequisite for getting one of these positions in the first place. Eighteen of the respondents, 62.1 per cent, hold bachelor's

degrees. Eight others have completed at least some college work, so that 86.2 per cent of the respondents have some education beyond high school.

Fifteen of the bachelor's degrees were earned at state institutions in Michigan, as shown in Table 6. Of the eighteen

TABLE 6.--Institutions Granting Bachelor's Degrees to Michigan Public Information Personnel

College or University	Number of Degrees	
Michigan State University	9	
University of Michigan	4	
Eastern Michigan University	1	
Northern Michigan University	1	
Total at Michigan Universities		15
Northwestern University	1	
State University of Iowa	1	
West Virginia State College	1	
Total at out-of-state schools		3
Total Bachelor's degrees		18

bachelor's degrees held by respondents, eleven are in fields considered among the communication arts--eight in journalism, and three in speech. (See Table 7.)

Four of the public information personnel, all at the executive level, have earned master's degrees. One public information executive has earned two master's degrees--one in adult education, and one in public health, the latter growing out of his work in the Health Department. The major fields of the master's degrees are journalism, English, adult education, public health, and forestry. The forestry degree was earned by a conservation education

TABLE 7.--Major Fields of Study of Michigan Public Information Personnel

Major Field of Bachelor's Degree	Number of Degrees
Journalism	8
Speech	3
English	3
Forestry	1
Home Economics	1
Natural Science	1
Psychology	1
Total	18

representative who later entered public information work. The master's degrees were earned at the University of Michigan (two degrees), Michigan State University (two degrees), and Columbia University (one degree).

In addition, several of the respondents indicated that they had enrolled for special workshops or course programs in communication fields. These included creative writing courses, radio-television classes, television workshops at Michigan State University, and graphics classes. Some had also been involved in courses or workshops related to their department's work. Aviation, conservation, and education were mentioned in this category.

A Civil Service examiner who has coordinated all phases of the hiring process for public information personnel has said he believes that there were fewer non-college graduates among the recent applicants for these positions than in past years.[3] Although there is no way to verify this because of the privileged

[3]Interview with Stone, September 22, 1965.

nature of Civil Service records, it is possible to compare the educational backgrounds of recently-hired employes with those of the veterans.

When compared in this way, the educational data on the respondents does not indicate a pronounced trend in the expected direction. As Table 8 shows, there is no definite tendency for

TABLE 8.--Relationship of Amount of Education and Length of State Service of Michigan Public Information Personnel

Length of State Service	H.S. Only	Some College	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Total
0-4 years	1	3	4	1	9
5-12 years	1	2	5	2	10
13 or more yrs.	1	3	5	1	10
Total	3	8	14	4	29

shorter state service to be related to more education. Among those with four or less years in state government, five of nine persons, about 56 per cent, hold at least a bachelor's degree. Of the ten persons in the five-year to twelve-year category, seven, or 70 per cent, have earned a degree. Six of the ten with thirteen or more years' service have a bachelor's degree. Similarly, those with master's degrees are not clustered, but are found among all three groups.

Prior Job Experience

With the exception of the conservation education class, most of the state employes in public information have some experience with the news media-

Among the public information executives, twelve of thirteen had worked either for a newspaper or in radio-television news. The other had never worked in any news medium, but did have sixteen years' experience in industrial publicity and public relations. As indicated in Table 9, nine of the public information executives had some newspaper experience. Three had worked

TABLE 9.--Previous Work Experience of Michigan Public Information Personnel

Civil Service Classification	Number of Persons with Experience in				
	Newspapers	Newspapers & Radio-TV	Radio-TV	No News Exper.	Total
Executives:					
Public Inform.	9	0	3	1	13
Conserv. Educ.	0	0	0	4	4
Specialists:					
Public Inform.	3	3	0	6	12
Total	12	3	3	11	29

in radio or television news. In addition, six of the group also had some experience in advertising, public relations, or public information work in industry, or in the armed forces.

In the specialist classes, only six of the twelve had had some experience with the news media. Three had newspaper experience, and three others had both newspaper and radio-television experience. In addition, eight of the group had done some work in advertising or public relations.

Among the public information specialists and executives, then, eighteen of twenty-five, 72 per cent, came into the state service with some experience behind them in a news operation.

Because of the nature of the conservation education positions, none of these men had any experience with any news medium, although one had done some work in the advertising field.

Media Experience and Public Information

In order to determine how the respondents compared their work with work in the news media, they were asked whether they felt that experience with newspapers or radio-television was essential background for a state public information worker.

The Civil Service requirements for these posts do provide some guidelines here. The specialists are required to have a stipulated amount of "full-time experience in writing for publication or broadcast."[4] The executive classes are required to have certain amounts of "experience in publicity or promotion work."[5] Nowhere, however, is there an explicit requirement of experience with either newspapers or radio-television news.

All but three of the respondents indicated that news experience had at least some value for state public information workers, although many said it was not really essential. Many of those who said that such background was not essential did state that it was "desirable," "helpful," or "preferred." Because of the varying shades of meaning in this open-ended question, and the overall purpose of the item, it is neither feasible nor desirable

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[4]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, "47004 Public Information Specialist I; 47005 Public Information Specialist II; 47006 Public Information Specialist III," p.2.

[5]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, "47056 Public Information Executive IIIa; 47037 Public Information Executive IV; 47017 Public Information Executive IVa; 47038 Public Information Executive V," p. 2.

to quantify these responses. However, sixteen of the respondents, 55 per cent, said that news media experience was not essential for public information personnel.

Several respondents indicated that news background was helpful because it sharpened the individual skills needed by public information personnel--precise writing, the mechanics of news style, and other matters of technique. Some of the comments of this type included:

> The different media require different approaches, styles, or techniques . . . experience is needed to know the differences.
>
> It (news experience) is an absolute necessity in order to be able to prepare and present materials of adequate interest and proper quality.
>
> Experience with the news media is essential . . . sharpens your sense of timing a story, provides insight into the type of story editors use, and most important, you learn when to stop writing.
>
> It is very helpful because it enables the purveyor to distill, organize and present information in the form most understandable and usable for the reader.

Other respondents emphasized the importance of news experience in gaining a thorough knowledge of press procedures and operations, and in developing good news sense.

> In preparing a news release, for example, I read over the copy and ask myself: "If I were back on the desk, would I use this or discard it?" I try to prepare material in such a way that it is hard for any editor not to use it. I would not know how to do this if it had not been for the years spent in judging news and making these decisions.
>
> As an editor, I have thrown away thousands upon thousands of handouts prepared by individuals who wouldn't know a story if they saw one, had never heard of newspaper style, and obviously didn't have the foggiest conception of what went on in newsrooms or composing rooms.
>
> With newspaper (and radio) background you have a much better opportunity to know whether your stuff will click

> . . . and how to make it click . . . (You gain) an in-depth knowledge of how the newspapers work, how editors think, and what constitutes news.
>
> An ample plus is gaining a sure knowledge of the other guy's operation, which tells you how best to work with him to your best advantage.
>
> It (news media experience) gives you a better understanding of what the news media will and will not use and the best form of presenting it.
>
> It gives you an inside understanding of the workings and requirements of the media you are serving.

A third major plus factor for news media experience mentioned by the respondents was on an interpersonal level--knowledge of the individual reporters and their needs, the acceptance that comes from being a past member of the press in-group, and other factors. Typical comments here include:

> If you've never worked on a paper, you can't have much empathy or sympathy for the reporters you work with.
>
> One has a better appreciation for and understanding of the newsman's problems . . . (news experience) enables you to communicate with them personally much better and is inclined to earn more respect from them.
>
> It (news experience) opens the doors and is quickly recognized by most people in the media.

Several respondents said that Civil Service job specifications require experience with the news media, but this is not completely accurate. As is mentioned above, Civil Service requirements do not explicitly demand a background in either newspapers or radio-television news.

A few respondents disputed the claim that news experience is desirable or helpful, saying instead that other qualities were far more important. Among these were:

> Not essential. There are just two essentials--ability to write and ability to learn.

Unnecessary. Practical experience and self-improvement will help one advance.

Other respondents claimed that work in government public information was unrelated to work with the news media, and, therefore, there was little value in a cross-fertilization of experience.

> I know a lot of news people who would not make good PR men and vice versa . . . (it) does not follow that a good background in the news media would make a good PR man.

> I have my doubts . . . I frankly feel that those in authority have little respect for able writers of any kind, partly because they do not realize the problems involved in creativity, and partly because they think writing is native to all men who are able to write a letter home or to a business associate. This is why government communiques sound so staid: they are the product of committee action and ceaseless editing.

The last comment was from a specialist who had had no prior experience with news media, and who was, admittedly, "disillusioned by government work."

Finally, one respondent went out on a limb in the other direction, and condemned news experience as an undesirable precondition to government public information work.

> In fact, I would consider it (news experience) a handicap, narrowing the subject's experience and limiting and confining his background to the extent that he might reflect prejudice or ignorance in his writing.

Overall, however, the respondents seemed to agree that there is some advantage to be gained from prior experience with the news media, but most feel that such background is not an essential prerequisite for doing a good job. Many see alternate routes to gaining those advantages.

The respondents were also requested to mention "anything in your background--either job or educational--that . . . was

especially helpful in preparing you for the kind of work you are now doing."[6] Here, most respondents indicated that the total spectrum of their experience had been of some value to them, especially educational background.

One type of experience mentioned most often as beneficial was work in the news media, which had helped them develop a sound news sense and sharper writing ability.

Another item often mentioned was the category of interest in the employe's department and its activities. One specialist in the Conservation Department summed it up this way:

> I think a person either makes it or falls by the wayside depending on how much interest he has in the things he's reporting about from week to week. I'm not a hunter or fisherman, but I do have an interst in writing about outdoor sports and recreation and the other activities covered by my agency's programs. What I'm trying to say is this: you don't have to be an expert about what you're writing about, but you've got to be interested--interested just as much as the people you're writing to. If you don't have that interest, you're in the wrong pew!

Respondents were also asked to mention "any type of experience or education you have not had which you now regret."[7] The answers given here closely paralleled responses to the previous question on especially helpful background.

The most common responses had to do with education. Many of those who had no college degree lamented this lack. Some who did have college degrees said that they regretted not going ahead to earn a master's degree. Specific course areas were also mentioned, with psychology and political science the two most common.

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[6]See "Personal History Questionnaire," Question 8, Appendix A.

[7]*Ibid.*

A few respondents mentioned the importance of knowing how people think and what motivates them, and said they regretted a lack of background in psychology for that reason. Others mentioned a need for more political science work to overcome a limited knowledge of government and its processes.

The second most common answer was in the field of work experience. Many said they would have liked more first-hand experience with newspapers--knowledge of plant operation, news handling and deadlines, graphics, and other areas. A few of those who had newspaper training said that radio-television operations were a weak area in their backgrounds. Apparently, as the growth of government public information continues, a working knowledge of all the news media is becoming more important. In addition to a facility in working with the print media, it will be helpful in the future if public information personnel are able to deal effectively with the needs of radio and television news outlets.

Finally, a few respondents said that they would have liked more training in the specialty of the agency by which they were employed. One respondent compared this need to the similar growth of specialization for newspaper reporters:[8]

> Reporters and state public information men are going to have to be expert in some subject matter field. You, as a reporter, have to know what kinds of questions to ask people. You have to be aware of the social and economic implications of government activity. It's not enough, for instance, to study science writing. You need to take courses in science. The metropolitan papers have people like this, but to cover government we need more reporters--and more state public information men--with extensive backgrounds in subjects like political science, sociology, and economics.

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[8]Interview with Hanna, August 17, 1965.

CHAPTER V

PUBLIC INFORMATION PERSONNEL AND THE CAPITOL REPORTER

Although the public information operations in many state agencies do come in contact with press outlets throughout Michigan, their main contact with the press is through the staffs of the various Capitol bureaus in Lansing. In order to get some idea of the press's assessment of state government public information personnel, reporters were interviewed from the Lansing bureaus of the Detroit News, the Detroit Free Press, the Booth Newspapers, Federated Publications, and the Associated Press.

Acceptance of Public Information Personnel

Historically, government public relations has been viewed with suspicion and scorn by both legislative bodies and the press. Therefore, an issue which sets the tone for government-press relations in Lansing is that of the acceptance of public relations as a legitimate governmental role. On the whole, this does not appear to cause any friction in the day-to-day newsgathering job in Lansing. None of the reporters expressed any doubts that the public information personnel were an accepted part of government and of the government-press relationship.

The veterans did note that the present view represented a major change from attitudes toward state public realtions men in

earlier years. One reporter who has worked in Lansing since 1935 commented:

> When there were fewer public information men and state government was less sensitive about its public image, I guess the veteran reporters thought these guys were completely unnecessary. Now, every agency of any consequence has at least one of these guys. As the average reporter looks at them now, they are a part of life. You have to judge them on the basis of the work they do, and the position they occupy. For instance, we know that the legislative press agents are simply partisan voices, so we treat them accordingly.
>
> A career publicist under Civil Service can be a definite help to a reporter. He can simplify the reporter's job by having on hand the kind of information needed to complete a story.

Willard Baird, Lansing bureau chief for Federated Publications (the Lansing State Journal and Battle Creek Enquirer-News in Michigan), agreed that there has been little recent controversy over the right of state government to publicize itself.[1] Baird, a veteran of more than sixteen years of covering Michigan state government, said:

> There was an era when there was this tendency on the part of the old hands to look down on news offerings by departments through hired public information people. Yet, even then, they used them.

Roger Lane, Lansing bureau chief for the Detroit Free Press, agreed that attitudes toward government public relations had undergone considerable change in recent years:[2]

> I used to stew about this. My second newspaper job was in Springfield, Illinois, in 1940. Some of the old dogs talked about the old days when they dealt personally with the governor, the lieutenant governor, or the secretary of state. They

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[1]Interview with Willard Baird, Lansing bureau chief, Federated Publications, and Capitol bureau chief, Lansing State Journal, January 6, 1966.

[2]Interview with Roger Lane, Lansing bureau chief, Detroit Free Press, January 4, 1966.

didn't have much truck with any of the others.

In Illinois in 1929, they had organized a State Division of Reports. Even when I came there in 1940, it was an arguable matter among reporters whether the governor had any business getting his department heads to channel all their information through this division.

Now, it has complete acceptance here, and in Washington and other capitals, too.

Is State Government News Coverage Adequate?

The reporters were also asked whether they felt that the public interest was being served if a large percentage of the news about state government was being generated by the government itself. Could the staffs of the Capitol bureaus, if they were increased in size, do an adequate job of covering state government without a host of state public relations men?

Most of the reporters seemed to feel that this was unrealistic. Baird was emphatic about this:[3]

> No news organization--paper, chain, or wire service--could provide a sufficiently large news bureau staff to cover the whole of state government so that you could wipe out all those state public information people and say you don't need them. Even when we had a three-man staff for the State Journal and Federated (Publications), we recognized that there were a good many news opportunities that we were not covering. To cover state government completely would require far more than a modest increase in staff.

Marion (Bud) Vestal, a seven-year veteran of Capitol coverage for Booth Newspapers, agreed:[4]

> No bureau could have enough people to adequately cover the important activities of state government. State government has become so complex, so diversified, so physically big, and touches so many lives that no one bureau could conceivably do the job.

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[3]Interview with Baird, January 6, 1966.

[4]Interview with Marion (Bud) Vestal, Lansing bureau, Booth Newspapers, January 14, 1966.

Richard L. Barnes of the Lansing bureau of the Associated Press said there was a "definite need for people within the agencies."[5] With nineteen major state agencies, the AP would need at least that many men to cover the executive branch alone without the help of public information men. "A lot of their stuff is routine announcements," Barnes pointed out. "It would be a waste of time to cover them constantly."

Apparently, the government public information system is a well-entrenched means of transmitting departmental news to the people of the state. In such a situation, isn't it much easier for the unfavorable stories to get passed over, never to be heard of by the electorate?

There is a problem here. The reporters agreed that public information men seldom go out of their way to release stories which would prove harmful to their agencies, but felt that mistakes, mismanagement, or outright corruption eventually come to light through some means. Baird commented:[6]

> There may be secrets in state government which would make pretty good stories, but I suspect that they are very few indeed. Is the public denied access to those agencies that don't get covered much? I would say not. An agency activity that is newsworthy, if it isn't initiated by the department or discovered by a reporter, gets to you either by deliberate effort or in the process of circulating among those people that do have access. We even get anonymous letters and phone calls.
>
> Sooner or later, in the rounds of the several reporters, it will be uncovered. All of the news people have a coterie of friends and acquaintances, and they get news tips from them, too.

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[5]Interview with Richard L. Barnes, Lansing bureau, Associated Press, January 3, 1966.

[6]Interview with Baird, January 6, 1966.

Vestal agreed that chances were small of blatant mismanagement or corruption going undetected, although detection might take a while. He pointed to the recent example of the People's Community Hospital Association scandal currently under investigation by the Attorney General. The association's director, it appears, spent more than $180,000 in a ten-year period on lobbying and parties in Lansing and Detroit.[7] This is not surprising, Vestal said, except that

> . . . to my undying shame, I found out that the P.C.H.A. was a state agency. Most people either didn't know or had forgotten that this was true. The director was spending money out of his own budget to come here and lobby the Legislature for his own organization. The only ones who could lose here were the people.
>
> Eventually, we got to him. It was almost by accident, but we got into this one and stopped it.

Of course, even in a case such as this one which is finally uncovered, the question occurs whether the press is really acting as the theoretical watchdog for the people. Is it enough to point out that a scandal was eventually rooted out, when closer scrutiny might have either prevented its occurrence, or at least stopped the waste short of $180,000?

A related problem is that of arousing public interest in state government. As was stated earlier, the national political scene seems to have pre-empted public attention. If a newspaper is to present a balanced picture of the world, how much news about state government is proper? And, even if more news were available, would it be worthwhile to print it, given the attitudes of the audience?

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[7]Interview with Vestal, January 14, 1966.

This theme was mentioned by several reporters. Barnes said:[8]

> Even if we did have twenty guys here doing this kind of stuff (in-depth, investigative reporting), who would use it? I don't mean to be cynical, but the average member of the public just doesn't care that much. He doesn't have the background.

Vestal agreed that reader tastes and interests had an effect on the amount and type of state government news readhing Michigan newspapers.[9]

> The problem of covering state government adequately is also a problem of bringing the news home to the people. A lot of stuff doesn't arouse the people--like when it becomes known that someone has cheated the state by selling a lower grade of gravel at a higher price.
>
> I've tried to stir up interest in things like that, and it just doesn't work. A $5,000 pay raise for the Legislature is different. It's easier for the people to comprehend and get excited about.

Accessibility

The public information man is often pictured as the middleman in the news flow, standing between the source of news, a director or a commission, and the newsgathering reporter. According to the reporters covering the Michigan state government, the state public information men are not always important links in the chain of news. They are often bypassed, and there is not an attempt to channel reporters' inquiries through the public information men in all cases.

One veteran said that "when the public information man can help me, I'll go to him. But when I want to talk to the director,

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[8]Interview with Barnes, January 3, 1966.

[9]Interview with Vestal, January 14, 1966.

I want to talk to him and not his press agent." Lane commented:[10]

> I usually deal with the director or the agency head whenever I can, especially if I have a pointed question that I need answered as of now. Whenever we need information quickly, we don't want to beat around the bush.

Vestal said that reporters[11]

> . . . don't always go to the pro (the public information man), but to the real sources of information. You have to find them in the various agencies, develop them, and keep in contact with them.

The reporters agreed that few instances of excessive secrecy or inaccessibility occurred in Lansing, even when the press was digging for more information about an obviously unfavorable story. The agencies need the cooperation of the press to obtain favorable news space in the long run, so they apparently are reluctant to antagonize reporters over any specific damaging story.

According to Baird,[12]

> In a delicate situation, the fellow will attempt to provide the information as best he can--although he may say that there will be no comment. Most of them try to put out fair and honest reports.

Vestal commented that[13]

> Few of the pros (public information personnel) are really evasive. Some are incompetent; some are ignorant of their own departments--the department head doesn't tell them much, and just uses them as a buffer. Most of these men are cooperative, even with a hostile reporter. I have problems with the Highway Department, but I always get the specific information I request, and promptly.

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[10]Interview with Lane, January 4, 1966.

[11]Interview with Vestal, January 14, 1966.

[12]Interview with Baird, January 6, 1966.

[13]Interview with Vestal, January 14, 1966.

The Handout

All of the reporters interviewed had only minor complaints about the quality of the news handouts emanating from Michigan executive agencies. The public information personnel apparently do have fairly sound news sense, and do not pelt reporters with huge quantities of wastebasket fodder.

Baird said that outright propagandizing is not a problem in Lansing.[14]

> These days, there is seldom any blatant, self-serving stuff. There may be a little department propaganda sandwiched in once in a while, but it is up to the reporter what he does with it. He may cut it to one paragraph, or he may take a one-paragraph story, and, by getting further information, expand it. Either way, the handout has served as a useful news source.

Vestal praised the quality of the news handouts, but he was a little less pleased with the quantity that reached the Capitol reporters.[15]

> Yes, the product of news from the agencies is pretty good. The quantity is awful; there's just too much. It's usually the departments with not too much news that try to flood you. The Highway Department, for instance, has a lot of legitimate news, but I feel they try to overreach. They invent stories, or break down one story into several.

According to Lane,[16]

> The great majority of the material is well done, and justified in some terms. For instance, the Tourist Council does a lot of stuff that is strictly promotional, but that doesn't mean that somebody can't use it--a travel editor, or a special television feature, something like that.

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[14]Interview with Baird, January 6, 1966.

[15]Interview with Vestal, January 14, 1966.

[16]Interview with Lane, January 4, 1966.

> Of course, there is sometimes a self-serving element. Certain phrasing is used; quite often things get omitted, anything to accentuate the positive.

In short, the non-news handout does not appear to be a problem for the Capitol reporters. They do throw away dozens of news releases, but, as Roger Lane commented, "That doesn't mean somebody can't use it."

However, several reporters did mention one agency which seems to be a flagrant purveyor of large quantities of handout trash--the Public Service Commission. Peter Spivak, the chairman, apparently holds some sort of record for having his name appear in the leads of the commission's news releases. According to one reporter,

> We will get four or five releases at a time, all saying something like "Peter Spivak, chairman of the Public Service Commission, announced today that a new crossing light will be installed at M-99 and M-26." The releases always mention his name. Generally speaking, we ignore releases like that, or just cut the name out.

One release last spring from the state Civil Rights Commission also revealed an excessive desire to attribute the handout to a departmental executive. It is difficult enough to do this with just one director, but the Civil Rights Commission has co-chairmen. A release of May 16, 1965, contained a lengthy quote followed by "Commission Co-Chairmen John Feikens and Damon J. Keith said."[17] The picture of the men synchronizing this dual quotation is a bit hard to conjure up.

The existence of a few publicity-hungry executives keeps the reporters busy editing their names out of many releases, but

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[17]Michigan, Civil Rights Commission, "Free Press First," May 16, 1965. (Mimeographed news release.)

otherwise poses no major problems.

Public Information Men and News Experience

All of the reporters interviewed recommended that state public information personnel have some sort of professional background in the news media before getting into state publicity work. They said that information men with such experience had been more effective in working with newsmen and in getting the most news mileage from their agency's activities.

Lane, who has worked with both the Associated Press and the Detroit Free Press in Lansing, said[18]

> In state government, news experience is most imperative if they are going to function satisfactorily from the reporter's standpoint. When I was in New York with AP, I came in contact with PR men who had no idea of how a wire service or a newspaper operated. The big news is pretty obvious, but a little bit of news sense and ingenuity is required to report on the less obvious stuff.

Baird said that he[19]

> . . . couldn't conceive of them functioning without that kind of experience. They need to understand the operation of the whole newsgathering and dissemination system. They must have some appreciation of what is desired and recognized as news by newspapers and wire services.

Another veteran reporter commented:

> The public information man tries to work things to benefit himself and the largest number of papers. It (news experience) teaches him not to try and cover up or disguise things. Those with news experience don't try this often, because they know it won't work in the long run.
>
> Those with experience start with an advantage--a better appreciation of the news function. They know how to best time a release to get the best play for it. For instance, on a day when there is going to be lots of news, they know enough to hold off a release.

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[18]Interview with Lane, January 4, 1966.

[19]Interview with Baird, January 6, 1966.

Overall, the Capitol press corps seems to have a congenial relationship with the public information personnel in Michigan state government. But there are a few points of friction. For instance, several reporters--including Vestal himself--observed that the Highway Department and Bud Vestal are not always on the friendliest of terms.

The publicity personnel, however, are not viewed as news shields who constantly hide skeletons in departmental closets and stymie hostile newsmen. The public information men are important news sources. They seem to work harmoniously with newsmen, and can often save a reporter quite a bit of time by finding needed information.

The reporters, at least, do not feel that the public interest is being betrayed by the current state of affairs. The competitive news situation in Lansing--there are seven separate newspaper and wire service bureaus, plus radio and television reporters from eight sources--would seem to provide some safeguards for the public interest.[20] Of course, the quality of news coverage cannot be of the highest caliber if reporters relax and count on the public information personnel to do their jobs for them. Both active, alert, intelligent reporters and informed public information men and women are important elements in the newsgathering function. Both are here to stay.

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[20]Michigan, Senate and House of Representatives, Directory (March, 1965), pp. 61-63. A list of newspaper, wire service, and radio-television bureaus and correspondents will be found in Appendix D.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

This study has been, primarily, a descriptive one. There has been no attempt to formulate scientific hypotheses in advance, to construct objective testing devices, or to reach statistically-determined conclusions. It has been, rather, an attempt to collect information about a certain narrowly-defined group of people--the classified public information people in Michigan executive agencies--and their role in the reporting of Michigan state government.

Some broad guidelines must be remembered in putting the role of these people in its proper perspective. Perhaps most important to remember is that they are only one cog in the state news collection machine. As was pointed out earlier, there are unclassified employes in several agencies who also play an important role in the dissemination of news. Many agencies have administrative assistants, assistants to the director, or others who are really public relations men under wraps. In the executive branch, the governor's office also has an impressive staff which disseminates information and works with the press.

Although this study has been focused on the relationship between the state government and the press, it should be pointed out that the press do not take up all of the time of the state

public information personnel. Two agencies--the Michigan Tourist Council and the Department of Economic Expansion--are admittedly publicity agencies. The Tourist Council, for instance, prepared material which appeared in newspapers in 30 other states and Canada. In addition, more than forty magazines used Michigan articles and photographs prepared by the council staff in 1964.[1] Ward Mayrand in the Department of Aeronautics produces a monthly periodical, Michigan Aviation.[2] The Highway Department prepares publications for use in travel information centers, and also produces films.[3] In short, the agency-Capitol press corps relationship is far from the only contact between the state government and the people.

And, of course, the executive branch is only one of three major branches of state government. The Supreme Court and Court of Appeals compete in Lansing for limited newspaper space across the state. When the Legislature is in session, the actions of the 148 legislators usually overshadow the continuing work of more than 32,000 classified state employes.[4] Willard Baird, who has covered Michigan state government for more than sixteen years, commented:[5]

During legislative sessions, the volume of news is

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[1]Michigan, Tourist Council, Annual Report: 1964, p. 8.

[2]Interview with Ward Mayrand, Aviation Information Supervisor, Department of Aeronautics, Lansing, May 11, 1965.

[3]Interview with William R. Hardy, Director of Motorist Services, Highway Department, April 26, 1965.

[4]Michigan, Civil Service Commission, Annual Report: 1964, p. 31.

[5]Interview with Baird, January 6, 1966.

> extremely high. I'm sure the administrative agencies feel neglected during the sessions. The reporters simply don't have time even to drop in on them. I used to find that I could make hay during the legislative sessions by covering the agencies. They were so glad to see me; they were all mine.

In addition, the Capitol reporters are also faced with blizzards of paper from individual senators and representatives, party headquarters, or legislative public relations men.

On the whole, we have found that the classified public information employes are a well-educated group. Most are products of Michigan colleges or universities. Most of them had some professional experience with the news media before beginning work with the state.

They have developed a certain amount of rapport and a good working relationship with the Capitol reporters, and now seem to be an accepted part of the news collecting task in Lansing. Unlike some public relations men in other fields, most have discovered that no news in a handout is not good news for a reporter. Although they are not eager to disseminate information about agency errors, they do not try to evade questioning or constantly cover up mistakes.

Recommendations

A move which would have been one of my first recommendations has already been taken by the state public information personnel. In August, 1965, they formed a group to discuss their mutual interests, needs, and problems. After one organizational meeting, they held their first formal

meeting on September 21, 1965. They almost asked to be upbraided by inviting a panel of Capitol newsmen to discuss their weaknesses, and possible steps to better their working relationships. Roger Lane of the Detroit Free Press, Willard Baird of Federated Publications, and Bud Vestal of Booth Newspapers presented some of the newsmen's complaints, and answered questions about their work and their needs. It was clear that some of the public information personnel had very little idea of the Capitol newsman's problems, and the little things that could be done to help alleviate them. It seemed to me that a helpful channel of communication can be opened by the group and meetings such as this.

The members of the group are clearly eager to improve their work, and seem to be utilizing a good means toward that end.

Another trend, in the procedure for hiring public information personnel, also seems to me to be beneficial. Examiners are more often using the interview board to select public relations personnel, rather than the written test. An evaluation of an individual's poise, personality, education, and experience by a board of experts in the field seems to me to be a most desirable way to select these employes. I would hope that this method would continue to be used for all job levels in this class.

I also feel that more consideration should be given to the departmental placement when public information personnel are hired. When an appointment is to be made to a definite position, it would seem that more provision should be made for evaluating the applicant's knowledge of, say, conservation for a post in that department. A newsman who doesn't know a mallard from an irrigation

ditch could run into trouble in the Department of Conservation. As one public information employe wrote, "You've got to be interested--interested just as much as the guy you're writing to. If you don't have that interst, you're in the wrong pew!" As an alternative, a new employe should at least be given ample time to get his feet wet by learning about the departmental structure, its goals, and its past history as soon as he begins work.

Other Research

This study has been focused on a small part of the state government newsgathering job. It has become evident that there are many other facets of this subject which could, and should, be examined in this way:

1. The role of the state-prepared handout in the total coverage of state government has not been determined. One official has suggested that eighty to ninety per cent of the stories emanating from the Capitol press room originate in handouts.[6] A study of the total volume of handouts, and the extent to which this news is used in selected state papers, would be helpful.

2. Since this study has been limited to the role of the Civil Service-classified employes, many hidden public relations personnel have been passed over. For instance, Deputy Attorney General Leon S. Cohan has quite a bit of contact with the press. Knight D. McKesson, a former public relations man, joined the staff of the Insurance Department in 1965 as a combination public relations man and editorial assistant. Alex Canja, administrative

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[6] Interview with Hardy, September 22, 1965.

assistant in the Department of Public Instruction, is also involved in the production of news releases about that department. With the help of Capitol reporters and other persons close to the scene, more of these people could be identified and their role examined.

3. Another part of the press operations of the executive branch--the governor's press office--has also been omitted from the present study. At this time, with such a nationally-prominent chief executive, a study of his press operations would be useful and interesting.

4. The executive branch is not the only branch of Michigan state government which makes extensive use of press agents. The Legislature itself also employs several persons to handle its public image, and a study of these people might also be undertaken.

In short, the present study is only a beginning. The opportunities for further examination of the state's role in the news business are numerous, and the above list is far from exhaustive.

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Interview with Molly M. Boelio, Public Information Specialist, Michigan Water Resources Commission, May 27, 1965.

Interview with Gordon Hanna, Public Information Officer, Michigan Civil Rights Commission, Detroit, August 17, 1965.

Interview with Otis S. Hardy, Assistant to the Director, Michigan Civil Service Commission, Lansing, April 28, 1965.

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Interview with William R. Hardy, Director of Motorist Services, Highway Department, April 26, 1965.

Interview with Roger Lane, Lansing Bureau chief, Detroit Free Press, January 4, 1966.

Interview with Ward Mayrand, Aviation Information Supervisor, Department of Aeronautics, Lansing, May 11, 1965.

Interview with William Mullendore, Chief Information Officer, Michigan Department of Conservation, January 12, 1966.

Interview with C. C. Riggs, Assistant Chief, Examination Section, Michigan Civil Service Commission, October 22, 1965.

Interview with Jerry L. Stone, Examination Technician, Michigan Civil Service Commission, September 22, 1965.

Interview with Marion (Bud) Vestal, Lansing Bureau, Booth Newspapers, January 14, 1966.

Letter from Otis S. Hardy, Assistant to the Director, Michigan Civil Service Commission, April 29, 1965.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER AND PERSONAL QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO PUBLIC INFORMATION PERSONNEL

Using information provided by the Michigan Civil Service Commission, a list was compiled of the thirty-four state employes considered public information personnel. These included the public information specialists, public information executives, and conservation education representatives.

Personal history questionnaires were sent to each of the thirty-four at their working addresses, accompanied by a letter identifying the researcher, and a stamped, self-addressed envelope to make completing and returning the questionnaire as painless as possible. Those who did not return the questionnaires within a month (there were nine of them) were sent a second questionnaire and a personal note asking them to take the time to supply the requested information. In the end, twenty-nine of the thirty-four questionnaires were completed and returned.

Copies of the original cover letter and of the personal history questionnaire follow.

1128 West Michigan Ave.
Lansing, Michigan
October 9, 1965

I am a graduate student majoring in journalism at Michigan State University. My thesis topic deals with the relationship between Michigan public information personnel and the mass media here in Michigan, and one of the things I am attempting to determine is the kind of people who fill the public information posts in the Civil Service of the State of Michigan.

Enclosed is a questionnaire which I hope you will take a few minutes to complete and return in the enclosed envelope. I am interested in three main categories of information--your background with the state service, your employment history before you began working for the state, and your educational background.

The information gathered from these questionnaires will be used, for the most part, to discern overall trends and not to determine individual histories. Where specific bits of information about certain individuals are used, the person involved will not be identified by name or by position.

Again, I would appreciate it very much if you could take the few minutes necessary to supply me with the information requested. Thanks in advance.

Sincerely yours,

Gerald J. Keir

PERSONAL HISTORY QUESTIONNAIRE

for

STATE PUBLIC INFORMATION PERSONNEL

Name:_____

Department:_____

1. What is your job rating in the Civil Service?_____

2. How long have you worked for the State of Michigan?_____

3. Has all of this time been in public information work? If not, what other kinds of work have you done for the state?

4. Has all of your time with the state been with the agency you now work for? If not, with what other agencies have you worked?

5. Would you please give me a brief resume of your employment experience before you began working for state government. I am particularly interested in any experience with the mass media --with newspapers, radio-TV, industrial or other governmental public relations work.

6. Would you please summarize your education background--institutions attended, degrees earned, major and minor fields of study?

7. Do you feel that experience in the news media is essential background for working in the government public information field? Why or why not?

8. Is there anything in your background--either work or educational--that you feel was especially helpful in preparing you for the kind of work you are now doing? Is there any type of experience or education you have not had which you now regret?

Thank you again for your time and assistance.

Gerry Keir

APPENDIX B

PAY SCALES

TABLE 10.-- Annual Salaries for State Public Information Personnel in Michigan: 1965.[a]

Class Number	Job Title	Minimum Pay	Maximum Pay
47004	Public Information Specialist I	$ 5,387.04	$ 6,660.72
47005	Public Information Specialist II	6,180.48	7,767.36
47006	Public Information Specialist III	7,370.64	9,437.76
47056	Public Information Executive IIIa	8,038.80	10,293.84
47037	Public Information Executive IV	8,811.36	11,316.96
47017	Public Information Executive IVa	9,813.60	12,674.16
47038	Public Information Executive V	10,962.88	14,135.76
47048	Public Information Executive Va	12,298.32	15,639.12
47049	Public Information Executive VI	13,739.04	17,387.76
47059	Public Information Executive VIa	16,056.72	19,5[illegible]
47257	Conservation Education Executive IV	8,811.36	11,316.96

[a]Michigan. Civil Service Commission. Compensation Manual: 1965.

APPENDIX C

MICHIGAN EXECUTIVE AGENCIES

AND THEIR PUBLIC INFORMATION PERSONNEL

Department of Aeronautics
(located in Department of Commerce under 1965 Reorganization Act)

Aviation Information Supervisor--Ward Mayrand
Public Information Executive IV
Capitol City Airport, Lansing 489-2421

News releases; publication of monthly periodical, Michigan Aviation; film distribution.

Department of Agriculture

Administrative Assistant (Public Information)--Joe E. Wells
Public Information Executive IIIa
6th floor, Lewis Cass Building, Lansing 373-1050

News releases; radio-television features.

Department of Civil Rights
(formerly Civil Rights Commission before 1965 Reorganization Act)

Information Director--Gordon Hanna
Public Information Executive IVa
900 Cadillac Square Building, Detroit 222-1723

News releases; arranges press conferences; monthly bulletin.

Department of Civil Service
(formerly Civil Service Commission)

Assistant to the Director--Otis S. Hardy
Public Information Executive VIa
322 Lewis Cass Building, Lansing 373-3026

News releases; spot radio and television announcements; adviser to director on matters of information.

Department of Conservation

Education and Information Section
Chief Information Officer--William Mullendore
Public Information Executive Va
Supervisor of Publications and Information -- John Gray
Public Information Executive V

Assistants: Charles Floyd, Public Information Executive IIIa
Russell McKee, Public Information Executive IIIa
Richard L. Lehman, Public Information Specialist III
Helen Wallin, Public Information Specialist I

3rd floor, Stevens T. Mason Building, Lansing 373-1214

News releases; weekly bulletin; radio-television announcements; bi-monthly magazine, Michigan Conservation; film production, tape-slide productions; pamphlets and instructional materials; film loan library.

Department of Economic Expansion
(located in Department of Commerce under 1965 Reorganization Act)

Director of Information--Justin C. Sutton, Jr.
Public Information Executive IVa
Room 110, Stevens T. Mason Building, Lansing 373-3535

News releases.

Department of Public Health

Office of Health Information
3500 N. Logan St., Lansing 373-3145

Chief, Office of Health Information--John R. Cook
Public Information Executive IV

Assistants: Charles Miller, Public Information Specialist III
Ernest Mullings, Public Information Specialist III

News Releases; radio-television spot announcements; bi-weekly Michigan Health magazine; special bulletins; film loan service.

Department of State Highways

Motorist Services and Reports Division
7th floor, Stevens T. Mason Building, Lansing 373-2100

Director of Motorist Services--William R. Hardy
Public Information Executive IVa

Assistants: Curtis H. Boos, Public Information Specialist III
Edward Boucher, Public Information Specialist II (Traffic Division)

News releases; publications and reports; film library.

Department of Mental Health

Public Information Officer--Joseph N. McCall
Public Information Executive IVa
5th floor, Lewis Cass Building, Lansing 373-3520

News releases; bi-monthly magazine, News and Notes.

Michigan Employment Security Commission
(transferred as autonomous entity to Department of Labor under 1965 Reorganization Act)

Chief, Information Service Division--John Watt
Public Information Executive IVa

Assistants: Gladys M. Johnson, Public Information Specialist III
Donald Konrad, Public Information Specialist I
7310 Woodward, Detroit TR2-4900

News releases; film library.

Department of Public Instruction
(located in new Department of Education under 1965 Reorganization Act)

Publicist--Mrs. Tricia D. Street
Public Information Specialist III
1st floor, State Capitol, Lansing 373-3324

News releases; annual "news kit" at school opening; weekly "News of the Week" bulletin.

Department of State

Information Officer--Peter G. Bommarito
Public Information Executive IV
State Capitol, Lansing 373-2520

News releases; weekly "News Notes" feature series.

Publicist--Henry Shippey
Public Information Specialist III
Garfield Building, 4612 Woodward, Detroit

Television slides; reports; some news releases.

Department of State Police
(now includes Civil Defense Advisory Council, Safety Commission)

Public Information Section
S. Harrison Rd., East Lansing 332-2521

Director of Public Information--Thomas J. Masterson
Public Information Executive V

Assistant--Harold J. Peterson, Public Information Specialist II

News releases; radio-television spot announcements; film library.

Michigan Tourist Council
(located in Department of Conservation under 1965 Reorganization Act)

Supervisor, Publicity Division--John A. Maters
Public Information Specialist III
1st floor, Stevens T. Mason Building, Lansing
373-0670

Assistant--John M. Jones, Public Information Specialist III

Photographer--Maurice Strahl

News releases; pictures; film library.

Water Resources Commission
(located in Department of Conservation under 1965 Reorganization Act)

Publicist--Miss Molly M. Boelio
Public Information Specialist II
200 Mill St., Lansing 373-3560

News releases; quarterly bulletin; slide presentation.

APPENDIX D

CAPITOL NEWS BUREAUS:

NEWSPAPERS, WIRE SERVICES, RADIO-TELEVISION

A. Newspapers

1. Booth Newspapers

William C. Kulsea, bureau chief
Marion (Bud) Vestal
Robert Longstaff
Robert Lewis

2. Detroit Free Press

Roger F. Lane, bureau chief
Thomas L. Shawver (political writer, in Lansing during legislative sessions or to cover important partisan activities)

3. Detroit News

Carl B. Rudow, bureau chief
Robert A. Popa
Robert L. Pisor
Glenn Engle (political writer, in Lansing during legislative sessions or to cover important partisan activities)

4. Federated Publications

Willard Baird, bureau chief

5. Lansing State Journal

Willard Baird, bureau chief
Bill Burke

B. Wire Services

1. Associated Press

Richard L. Barnes, bureau chief

Alois Sander
Philip Brown
Robert E. Voges

2. United Press Internationsl

Thomas A. Pledge, bureau chief
Sam Martino
Jane K. Denison

C. Radio and Television

1. WILX-TV News (Jackson)

William Backus

2. WJIM Radio and TV (Lansing)

William D. Dansby
Ronnie L. Little
Lawrence [illegible]

3. Mid-States Broadcasting

Robert Lyle

4. WILS Radio (Lansing)

Ralph Baum

5. WKAR Radio (East Lansing)

Rob Downey
Lowell Newton

6. WOOD Radio and TV (Grand Rapids)

Del Blumenshine

7. WITL Radio (Lansing)

Michael O'Shea

8. Gongwer News Service

John [illegible] Burdock
William Davison