

To: citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.gov

From: Joe Pogar

Date: 3-03-25

Re: Item 16 – March 4, 2025 City Council Meeting: Discussion of Media Press Control Procedures

Council Members:

I am writing to you as a constituent, objecting to institution of the Media Press Control policy described in the *Sebastopol Times* on February 28, 2025, and Agenda Item 16, March 4, 2025 City Council Meeting. Not only does it have a chilling effect on the work of journalists, it raises constitutional questions.

Therefore, I request that the City Council immediately withdraw Item 16 from the March 4, 2025 City Council Meeting agenda and spend your time working on the myriad of issues that currently confront the City of Sebastopol and its residents.

In the current era in which there has been a major decline of regional and national newspapers, it is more important than ever to support a dedicated journalistic community. They are the “flashlight” that brings transparency to issues that go unknown or overlooked. The Founding Fathers were prescient in recognizing the need for a strong, unfettered press. This was the basis for the First Amendment found in what we term the Bill of Rights [the Fifth Article of the Original Constitution]

“Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech or of the press”

I remind each City Council member that you took an oath under California Gov Code Section 1363 to support the Constitution of the United States.

Institution of a press policy would be a regressive act by the City Council at a time when we need more open discussion about issues facing Sebastopol and our surrounding community. It is a policy of control over free speech, and it suggests a “bunker mentality” by the City Council and City Administration.

Furthermore, a press policy that requires prior notice, so that responses from the City can be “massaged” and formulated, results in suspicion about the unstated motives and competency of the current City Council and City Administration to deal with major issues facing Sebastopol.

The goal of the current Council and City Administration should be to rebuild the Sebastopol community’s confidence in your ability to resolve past and present problems confronting the City. An active journalistic community that is not inhibited by the press policy that Sebastopol is considering can be a great vehicle to help reverse suspicion and lack of confidence in Sebastopol’s municipal government by timely, objective reporting on City Council and City Administration actions.

Please withdraw Item No. 16 – Media Press Control Plan.

Joe Pogar

