



STAFF PHOTO BY STEPHEN CASTLE

Panel extraordinary: It's a case of an evening over too soon for many members of the audience who came out Wednesday to hear these prominent journalists and jurists.

Whose freedom comes first?

By JUDITH DOSER BERNE
STAFF WRITER

A First Amendment issue drew an audience of about 300 to The Community House in Birmingham Wednesday night where an impressive panel of jurists and journalists basically agreed to disagree.

The issue: the individual's right to privacy vs. the public right to know.

"If you want a truly free and uninhibited press, you're going to get some mistaken barking," led off Carl Stern, NBC national correspondent and twin brother of George Stern of Bloomfield Township.

But even NBC's Stern disagreed with press actions that forced Arthur Ashe to disclose that he has AIDS and the naming of alleged rape victims, such as in the William Kennedy Smith case.

"I do not defend the excesses," Stern said, "but I surely doubt whether a kinder, gentler press is a goal alternative."

Press freedom backed

Thomas Bray, editorial page edi-

FORUM

tor of the Detroit News, took a stricter view of the public's right to know.

He defended publishing the Ashe story, saying that when stories were written about Ashe's previous health problems, "there was no question of him being a public figure."

He saw it as the press's duty, but added: "Nobody feels very good about this."

Oakland Circuit Judge Hilda Gage addressed First Amendment Rights as they pertain to the judiciary. "When you go into office, you give up a lot of First Amendment rights," she said.

Former Michigan Supreme Court Justice Dennis Archer suggested that journalists be subject to a licensing board, which includes a disciplinary system to investigate when ethics violations or invasion of privacy questions are raised.

Bray strongly disagreed. "I think the press shows that we are part of the community. I don't think we need a licensing board, there are al-

ready mechanisms through the legal process."

"Dan's personal disclosures detract from the real issues," came a question from the audience.

Stern was an *one side*. "What's a real issue if not the character of the candidate. There's no way to separate these things."

"Then you end up with a Supreme Court candidate with no life experiences at all," Gage returned. "I think we're coming into new times. There's never been such fly-pecking. We'll see what we get."

Added Archer: "If someone is an alcoholic, those things become relevant. But you are seeing outstanding men and women who are hesitant to enter into public service."

Jurors' privacy

Another issue raised from the audience was the privacy of jurors.

Gage said the court and the media have generally cooperated in keeping the names of jurors secret and leaving it up to the jurors whether they wish to go public.

"We have to be exceedingly protective of our jurors," Archer concluded. Otherwise, our system of

justice would break down."

Response was positive to this first public issues forum by The Community House, with most of those interviewed favoring privacy over the public's right to know.

"I thought it was an excellent forum," said Beverly Knight, a Birmingham resident. "The kind of solidified by the media's insistence that we're really interested in whether they public office seekers smoked grass when they were 15 as opposed to their stance on substantive issues."

Helene Struer of Bloomfield Township "saw different sides of issues that I thought were simple until I heard them from the other perspective."

Barbara Waudron said Archer's points were on the mark regarding the press tearing away from public office the "most qualified people." "The smart, and the rich and the intelligent will not run for office," she said.

Ed Pastor of Birmingham said the panel made some interesting points, but thought the program was too short. "I don't think everybody was ready to quit."



Listening up: Frannie Greenebaum, right, seated next to her husband, Julian, had to have been excited about the turnout and quality of the forum she initiated for The Community House.

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