

2016-23: Jeffrey Seidman vs National Post

*For immediate release*

A complaint that the National Post used a would-be contributor's article as the basis for an article of its own was dismissed by the National NewsMedia Council.

Jeffrey Seidman stated that he submitted an article called "The end of tobacco" to the National Post on February 3, 2016, which described the ill effects of smoking and outlined a graduated form of tobacco prohibition. The article was an enterprise endeavor in honour of his late father.

He received a rejection notice the next day, but said that on February 13 an article called "Tobacco activists plan 'Endgame'" and closely resembling his submission was published. He alleges his article was used as inspiration, including his exact proposal, one or more of his exact terms, and a number of his points, all without credit or reference.

The National Post questioned the reporter, comment editor and handling editor to investigate the allegation. The paper said the reporter filed the story January 20, two weeks before the complainant's submission, after a pitch made December 9, based on a conversation in May that led to the story idea. The paper noted it has emails and records to confirm those dates.

The paper said the comment editor and comment department staff did not share the complainant's submission with the reporter, and would not have known the reporter had already filed a story on the same topic.

Reviewing the complainant's article and the paper's story, there is no similarity beyond the general topic of tobacco use. The complainant's article focuses on the harmful effects of tobacco use and graduated prohibition as a solution. The paper's article focusses on a health professional 'summit' on ending tobacco use and examines the pros and cons of several strategies, with little support cited for prohibition.

The Council found little similarity between the two articles. The paper's explanation of timelines is reasonable and accounts for a coincidence that is understandably upsetting to the complainant.

Area – plagiarism Tags – unauthorized use, sources