

**2019-49: Yonson vs Canadian Press**

June 12, 2019

The National NewsMedia Council has dismissed a complaint about the use of anonymous sources in a story published by the Canadian Press.

The complainant, Doug Yonson, objected to an April 9, 2019 Canadian Press article that ran under the headline “Free dental care for low-income seniors to be announced in budget.” This news report was a short pre-budget story that confirmed Ontario’s governing Progress Conservatives would act on providing low-income seniors with free dental care, which was promised during the election campaign.

In his submission, the complainant alleged the news organization’s use of anonymous sources was unacceptable because they undermined the credibility of journalists and their work. He further argued that the growing practice of relying on anonymous sources leaves news organizations themselves vulnerable to be manipulated by politicians and other government officials, which does a significant disservice to the public.

In its response, the news media organization indicated that the appropriate use of anonymous sources is an ongoing conversation in the newsroom. In terms of this specific complaint, the news organization said all of its internal protocols were followed: confirming details of the impending announcement with more than one source; describing the source; and seeking additional opposition voices to provide context. It also reiterated that the story was in the public interest.

The NNC supports the widely-recognized journalistic principle that news organizations should avoid use of anonymous sources as much as possible, and when they are used to provide as much contextual information as possible. Similarly, the NNC supports the accepted principle that reporting on government budgets serves an important public function.

In considering this complaint, Council distinguished between the news organization’s description of the source as a ‘government source’ rather than an ‘anonymous source’, and is satisfied that in doing so it gave the reader useful and relevant context about the credibility and motivation of the source.

Unlike in investigative journalism, where sources may be granted anonymity by a news organization under [certain specific conditions](#) for the purpose of serving the public’s right to know, this report relied on a government source for a straightforward preview of a policy promised during the election and planned for announcement in a soon-to-be released budget. Council found no evidence to support the complainant’s view that the news organization was manipulated by government. Rather, the motivation of a government official providing a journalist with advance details of a promised program is abundantly clear.

For these reasons, and after carefully reviewing the news story in question and supporting submissions, the NNC found no breach of journalistic standards with regard to the use of anonymous sources and dismissed the complaint.

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