

2019-93 Hill vs County Weekly News

December 4, 2019

The National NewsMedia Council has mediated and found that corrective action was taken to address an attribution error in an opinion column that appeared in the October 17, 2019, edition of the County Weekly News.

The County Weekly News published the column, "The goal of reducing Canada's debt is not something to be ridiculed," with the byline and photo of the regional editor, who is also a columnist for the publication.

The complainant, John Hill, argued that the County Weekly News attributed the column to the wrong author and was concerned that the original author had not received appropriate credit. The complainant noted that free weekly papers in rural communities should be held to the same journalistic standards as their urban counterparts and dailies, which include appropriate attribution of stories. He also cited expectations under copyright law.

In reviewing the complaint and article in question, the NNC noted that the column was in fact written by columnist John Ivison and originally published in the October 11 edition of the National Post, another Postmedia publication.

When alerted to this complaint, the news media organization responded by stating that the regional editor had made the error when he copied and pasted the column from the system that the publication uses to publish and share Postmedia content. He stated that the column was automatically attributed to him when he submitted it for use in the County Weekly News, and that he failed to catch the error while proofreading the page for print. The editor apologized for the attribution error.

The County Weekly News published a correction in its November 28 edition, which noted the attribution error and stated its regrets.

The National NewsMedia Council strongly supports the notion that journalistic standards apply to all news media organizations, regardless of geography or circulation. Standard practice requires journalists to ensure proper attribution so that individuals and organizations are given appropriate credit for their work. The NNC supports the view that original materials should be subject to applicable copyright laws.

In this case, the NNC notes that the news media organization took steps to explain and correct this attribution error. In light of the published correction, the NNC considers this matter resolved due to corrective action.