

PRESIDENT'S RESPONSE

MAY 10, 1968

EXECUTIVE MOTOR HOTEL, RICHMOND

This is not going to be a lengthy speech, full of shocked surprise at my elevation to the presidency of our Association.

If anybody should be delivering that kind of speech it is _____, whose election as ^{Today V.P.} ~~treasurer~~ means that ~~two~~ ^{ONE} years hence he will be up here in his first appearance as president of the state's only professional news broadcasting organization.

However, I believe that as your new president there are some few things I should say here tonight; a few brief observations on the Virginia Associated Press Broadcasters yesterday, today and tomorrow.

The point is, you ought to know what I have in mind concerning VaPB -- in case impeachment seems advisable after tonight.

I wonder, to begin with, how many of you know that today's annual meeting marked the 19th anniversary of VAPB.

It began, fittingly enough, here in Richmond. There were 35 of us at that significant session on February 24, 1949. Governor William Tuck spoke at what passed for a banquet. I don't remember what he told us, but it had something to do with the AP's excellence --- and our own powers and responsibilities as reporters. I have a distinct recollection of wondering what he meant by that. It bothered me -- mostly because I had been a reporter less than a year, and I wasn't sure of what I meant by that.

What impressed me most, I suppose, was that I was seeing a governor of a state close up for the first time in my life. It boded well for me, the profession and the fledgling VAPB.

There were a few other memorable people at that first memorable meeting. There was Cam Arnoux, WTAR's awesome patriarch. There was Eddie Whitlock, whose magnificent new WRNL studios took your breath away.

There was, as there almost always has been, Frank Sterns; even then AP's astounding ambassador of good will and super salesmanship.

There was Jack Weldon, our first President, who - some few of you may remember - was not only manager of various radio operations in his time, but also an AP man of skill and dedication.

There was Emileigh Maxwell, Virginia's first -- and I think -- only woman news director. No WTAR reporter has ever matched her good looks, and I suspect few have ever exceeded her in journalistic ability.

There was John Eure, then news director of WDBJ Radio, and now put out to print pasture as Managing Editor of the Roanoke World-News.

There was the beloved Frank Fuller, who brought us into being as an organization and guided us through the first 16 years.

And, finally, out of those 35 pioneers, most of whose names I have forgotten, there were two others at that first VAPB meeting who are still ~~here~~ ^{ACTIVE MEMBERS} tonight: One was Charlie Blackley of WTON in Staunton;

The other was ... me.

I mention this not to impress you with my longevity in VAPB. If the truth be known, I find it depressing.

The point is, I have been part of the Virginia Associated Press Broadcasters since its beginning, and I think that qualifies me to evaluate its past, appraise its present and forecast its future.

It is fair to say that the VAPB's early years were not spectacular in their record of achievement.

True, we established an awards competition that became a model for other state AP organizations. But the success of our annual awards program tended too often to cloud the purpose of the VAPB.

We had trouble defining that purpose, too. Was it only to improve the AP's service to its broadcast members in Virginia?

Or was it to raise the standards of news broadcasting in Virginia?

It cannot be said that we were an effective force in state journalism. We were introspective, insular.

The Virginia Association of Broadcasters spoke for the industry. The VAPB seldom spoke, and when it did, it spoke about sprucing up the AP radio wire report; not about sprucing up news broadcasting.

But gradually things began to change. The awards competition became a little more realistic -- and consequently tougher. It took better newsmen and enthusiastic management to win each year.

AP stations in Virginia began to hire professional newsmen in greater numbers. More managers began to take far greater interest in seeing that news was handled with competency.

There were more demands made at annual meetings for improvements in the AP wire. Reports turned in by wire study committees were no longer quietly accepted without debate.

And things got better. Attendance at our annual meetings improved steadily; not because there were more AP broadcast members -- although there were. But because the exchange of ideas at these meetings became more stimulating and challenging.

So did the seminars. After several disappointing experiences -- while we tried to determine what a seminar ought to be -- we found the answer. Last year's seminar proved that we can produce useful, exciting programs for self-education.

What was happening was maturity. We had begun to recognize ourselves as an organization of professionals in news broadcasting.

In the last few years, we have been able to say that VAPB is indeed a society of professional broadcasters, working with the Associated Press for better news broadcasting in Virginia.

We have been noticed, finally. The newspapers know who we are, so do our friends from the Virginia Association of Broadcasters.

I know of no greater proof that we now count as a force than the invitation extended to President Al Charles this winter to testify at a legislative committee hearing in Richmond on that open-meetings bill.

That committee listened attentively to representatives of the APME, the VPA, the VAB, Sigma Delta Chi and newspapers all over the state. They listened just as attentively to the president of the Virginia Associated Press Broadcasters.

It augurs well for the future -- as long as we continue to demonstrate responsibility as an organization --- as long as we continue to raise the standards of news broadcasting in Virginia ---- as long as we want the AP to provide the best possible broadcast wire service --- as long as we are willing to work for a better VAPB.

And that's what I'm going to ask of each of you during this coming year -- work.

I'm not just talking about committee assignments for the coming year. You'll hear about those shortly.

I'm asking you to work like the devil in your own shop this year. Work to make sure yours is the best possible news department your station can afford.

Work to beat the competition. Work to stay on top of every news break. Work to see to it that freedom of information is a reality.

Work to assure that your news department has the respect of your community and that your newsmen are regarded as the best in town.

Work to protect the AP -- and to keep it as the best news service there is.

Yes, and work to the end that every one of your newscasts is a potential award winner.

With that kind of effort at each station, plus a system of effective, busy committees during the next year, VAPB will inevitably continue to progress and add to the respect it gathered under Al Charles in 1967 and 68.

As for me, I will do my best to take up where Al leaves off tonight.

I'll begin by naming -- within a few days -- the committees which will do the organization's work in the coming year -- and I promise you, they will be working committees, driven by working chairmen.

On my part, I will make myself available to any of you at any time, to assist in any way I can to further the cause of the Virginia Associated Press Broadcasters.

I plan to seek invitations to attend meetings of both print and broadcast organizations in Virginia to represent us and talk about us.

I hope to be able to drop in and see many of you this year -- for a better idea of what problems face individual VAPB stations, particularly, I should add, in Freedom of Information. As co-chairman of the Freedom of Information Committee of the Radio- Television News Directors Association I may be in a good spot to assist our own FOI committee in

handling Virginia problems.

After 19 years, we are at last a broadcast news organization with respect, purpose and strength. With your help, I hope to keep it that way.
