

March 31, 2008

2010
Ernie Wilkinson

Nomination of Gene Policinski for induction into the Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame submitted by Ernie Wilkinson, board member of the Hall of Fame.

Gene Policinski

Gene Policinski, vice president and executive director of the First Amendment Center, is a veteran journalist whose career has included work in newspapers, radio, television and online operations.

Policinski oversees all operations and programs of the center, which has offices in Nashville, at Vanderbilt University; and in Washington, D.C. He also is co-author of the weekly syndicated newspaper column, "Inside the First Amendment," and executive producer/host of the touring multimedia stage production, "Freedom Sings."

Policinski came to the Freedom Forum in 1996 from *USA TODAY*, where he was a founding editor and held various news executive positions. He began his journalism career in 1969 in Indiana, where he worked as a newspaper reporter and later as state bureau chief for Gannett News Service. In 1980, he became a correspondent in the GNS Washington bureau, reporting on Congress, politics and other issues.

In 1982, he was named Washington editor of *USA TODAY* during its development period, and he held that post when it launched on Sept. 15. In 1983, he was named a Page One editor. In 1985, he was named deputy managing editor/sports and later was named managing editor/sports. He is the founding editor of *USA TODAY Baseball Weekly* (now *Sports Weekly*). From 1991 through 1993, he was the on-air host of three news, sports and information programs on USA TODAY Sky Radio. He also helped develop *USA TODAY*'s first online ventures.

In April 1996, he joined the Freedom Forum as a journalist in residence, directing a special Olympic Games program, and in September was named special assistant to the chairman and chief executive officer. Since joining the foundation, he has held a number of executive roles, and was Washington editor for the First Amendment Center's Web site in 1999. Also, he was host and writer for of "Newseum Radio," a one-hour program that aired on National Public Radio Worldwide from 1997 to 2001. And he was executive producer of "Speaking Freely," a weekly interview program, which aired nationwide on public television from 2001 to 2005.

Policinski was named deputy director of the First Amendment Center in June 2000. He became executive director in 2004 and vice president in 2007.

He serves as a member of the selection committee for the Diversity Institute, a program of the Freedom Forum that aims to increase the number of minority journalists in reporting and management positions in American newspapers.

A lecturer and consultant on journalism issues ranging from newsroom ethics to new media, Policinski is on the board of advisers of the Center for the Study of Sport in Society at Northeastern University, Boston; and the board of governors of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, Mid-South chapter. He is an adjunct professor at Winthrop University in South Carolina and a member of the journalism alumni board at Ball State University in Indiana.

Polinski was born in South Bend, Ind. He is married to Kathleen B. Powell, an educator. They have two sons.

Polinski quotes

The nation's founders took particular care more than 200 years ago to respect the right of every person to choose their religious faith without government interference, or to have no faith at all. These recommendations are an important starting point in evaluating and strengthening this basic right so that it may better withstand the pressures of the 21st century."

Government officials will not always act in the best interest of citizens. Without a free press to be a watchdog, there really are no restraints

The bottom line is, we have a right in America to express our views, even if most people would think them repellent."

The American Athletic Union presented its Media Person of the Year Award to Gene Polinski in 1994 and 1995 when he was USA Today sports editor. The award goes to the newsperson who does the most during the year to present most accurately the programs and objectives of the Union.

Gene is a former president of the Indianapolis Press Club.