

Journalists don't select issues, editor says

By MARIAN GREEN
Of the Emerald

Reg Murphy, editor and publisher of the San Francisco Examiner, said politicians and essayists charge today's press with creating the national agenda, but in reality journalists can't even agree about which style of writing to use.

Murphy spoke in the EMU Monday night as part of the journalism school's Ruhl Symposium.

Murphy has been the editor and publisher of the Examiner since 1975. He began his newspaper career in Macon, Georgia, and went on to become politics editor and then editor-in-chief of the Atlanta Constitution.

But Murphy is best known for

the time he was kidnapped in 1974. He was held captive for 50 hours until the Atlanta Constitution paid a \$700,000 ransom for his release.

"There is a symbiotic interrelationship that no one can deny," Murphy said of the relationship between journalists and politicians.

"Of course we are looking for headlines. And of course politicians want to appear in headlines. That is the stuff that makes politics work."

Murphy said that he and his colleagues would rather cover much simpler subjects. "But we didn't pick the issues. We report them."

"We have gone from the reporting of the knowable — the shooting on Main Street, the promotion of a new vice pre-

sident for the bank, even the train wreck — to the unknowables of poisoned atmosphere and economic ruin which threaten all of us all the time," he said.

"We have begun to report not on the finite things of existence but on the ideas which consume the best minds of our time."

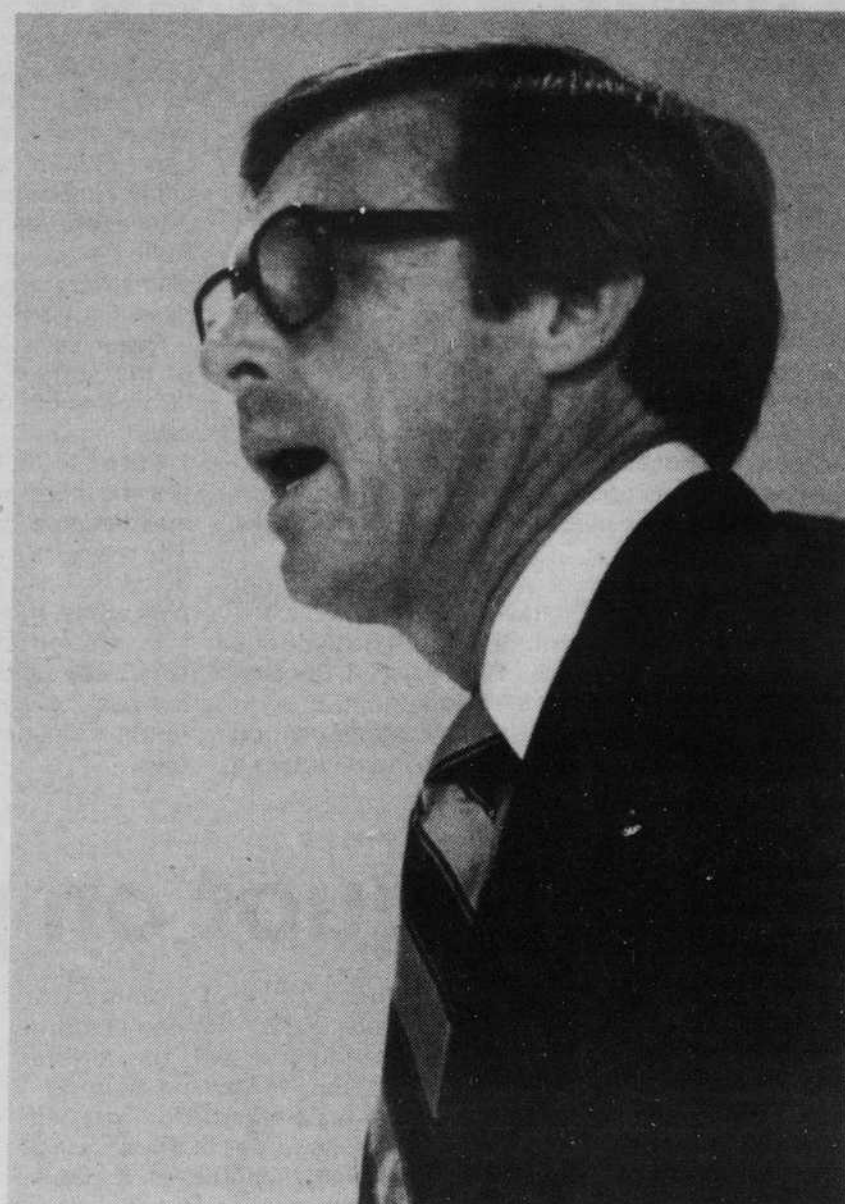
"What the country has confused is the difference between the thinking which goes into the issues and the reporting after they become reality," Murphy said, citing that news people may be the largest consumer group for quality books.

When he was a political correspondent, "It wasn't uncommon for presidential campaign writers to pick the brains of the correspondents before preparing texts," Murphy said. The candidate and staff had the ultimate control over the material, and journalists merely reported what was used out of a flood of ideas.

Because the reporters and commentators sometimes have better information and better background than the people on whom they report, "it has created a broad misconception in the country that we are thinking up the issues rather than reporting and interpreting," he said.

Murphy admits that the news media do set a portion of the agenda because "we choose the headline type, the placement of stories, the pictures and charts and the editorials and columnists."

To the question of who elected the news media to set even this portion of the agenda,



Reg Murphy

Photo by Keith Allen

Murphy said, "We were elected by Alexander Hamilton and Ben Franklin when they wrote the Constitution. And by Thomas Jefferson when he articulated the need for a free press. And by the people who pay us twenty

cents a day to investigate and write about the things they want to know."

"We were elected specifically to write about the human condition and to report on what has happened to it."

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IFC saves Drug Info Center

The Incidental Fee Committee bailed the Drug Information Center out of a financial hole Monday, allocating \$3,000 to the center from unallocated reserves.

The money will carry the program through May, according to DIC director Mark Miller. He said tentative fund-raising efforts should be enough to keep the center open through July 1, when the next fiscal year begins. However, "it's possible we could shut down in June."

Miller requested the money from the committee last week. He said the center had counted on about \$5,000 from a fund-raising drive in the Eugene 4-J School District, but the drive did not take place. The charity funds were promised to the center in exchange for speeches and training sessions Miller gave at Eugene schools.

He said there was no chance

of getting any money from school district coffers, and the IFC was the last resort.

"We're playing big boys' games where big boys are having problems these days," he said.

Students receive about 40 percent of the DIC's services, but pay only about 15 percent of its budget, according to Miller. Other funding sources are the State Mental Health Division, Lane County, the Eugene school district and in-service fees.

In other business, the committee allocated \$2,089 to the Office of Student Advocacy so the program could complete payments on an IBM memory typewriter it purchased earlier in the year.

The original plan was to pay for the machine over a three year period, charging students

typing fees to fund the loan. But OSA director Don Chalmers said he asked the IFC to pay off the loan to avoid making the interest payments.

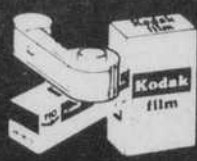
The IFC money was loaned to the student advocacy office and will be paid back over a two-year period with no interest.

The committee also granted \$194 to Women's Resource and Referral for telephone expenses.

Program representatives requested the money because last year's IFC budgeted an incorrect figure in the program's telephone line item.

SNuff, an anti-nuclear group, requested money from the committee to take two buses to an anti-nuclear rally Saturday in Portland, but committee members refused to allocate any money, suggesting the program use state vans for the trip.

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