

Journalism // 4 cases: What you would do Series: Choices

[CITY Edition]

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By Christopher Scanlan

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Is it proper for reporters to pretend to be what they are not to get a story - posing as bar owners, for instance, to expose graft and corruption involving city officials?

Should a television station broadcast details of an adoption because the child is the daughter of a convicted murderer and the man who wants to adopt her is the prosecutor who sent the child's mother to prison?

If a newspaper has a policy against using unnamed sources, is it ethical to abandon it for a major story, especially if a competitor which has no such restrictions is scoring major scoops and making off with readers and advertisers?

Should a newspaper editor authorize a stakeout of a political candidate to see if she is having an affair with a campaign adviser?

Last month, we asked Times readers to consider those ethical dilemmas as Choices, our continuing series of ethics tests, focused on journalism.

More than 250 readers replied, among them professional and student journalists, retired reporters and readers concerned about media ethics.

The fictionalized scenarios are based on real-life examples, including the recent decision by the Miami Herald to stake out the Washington townhouse of Democratic presidential hopeful Gary Hart. Hart withdrew amid widespread publicity triggered by the Herald's report that he spent the weekend with a young woman while his wife was home in Colorado.

``As a possible future journalist, this (ethics test) really interested me,`` wrote R. Corey Remke, a 16-year-old Clearwater student who wanted to know how the journalists reacted in the other examples the cases were based on.

In the second case, the Oregon television station was still trying to decide whether to broadcast the adoption story when the local newspaper broke the story. The station then followed suit.

The undercover operation stems from the decision by the Chicago Sun-Times in 1978 to open the ``Mirage Bar.`` The story uncovered bribery and kickbacks, but the paper was denied a Pulitzer prize by editor-judges who deemed the deception unethical.

In the final case, the Tennessee editor held fast to his policy against using unnamed sources and pursued the story through other channels.

The choices made by our readers appear below. Percentages do not add up to 100 because some readers chose none of the given options. Some readers chose to remain anonymous.

Andrew Barnes, editor and president of the St. Petersburg Times, one of four journalism professionals who took the ethics test, found the scenarios ``extremely realistic ... the way problems come to you. No month passes when you don't have to deal with one of these where it's tough.``

Holly Steuart, news director of WTOG-Ch. 44, said, ``Every day our job is making choices. The thing about ethical decisions (is) if you take a stand, there's always the chance of making a mistake.`` Case 1: Stakeout

You are the executive editor of the state's largest newspaper, known for its aggressive investigative reporting. The paper's political editor has received a tip in an anonymous phone call about Martha Spenser, the Republican candidate for the Senate and the front-runner in the 1988 race. The tip concerns rumors plaguing the campaign that Spenser, who is married, is having an affair with a former priest who now is an activist lawyer in your city. Spenser has publicly confronted the rumors before, and insisted the lawyer is just a trusted adviser. This weekend, the tipster says, Spenser and the lawyer have rented a beach condo. You and top editors debate how to approach the story. Some editors want to assign a team of reporters to stake out the condo to see if Spenser spends the weekend alone with the lawyer. ``The woman's character is a legitimate campaign issue and this speaks to it directly,`` one editor argues. Besides, she says, Spenser has even challenged reporters to ``follow me around for a couple of days. I have nothing to hide.`` Other editors oppose the idea, saying it unfairly invades the candidate's privacy. ``We knew Jack Kennedy had affairs, but we never printed it. FDR had a mistress, but that never was news. A candidate has a right to a private life.`` What's your decision? How the Readers Voted

50%- Assign the reporters to stake out the condo.

29%- Don't authorize a stakeout.

18%- After the weekend ask Spenser for comment about the tip.

Reader comments

Authorize stakeout. It's true a candidate has a right to a private life. But the public has a right to know what kind of political leader - man or woman - should be placed in office because it affects the standards the public has to live under and the future. - Shannon L. Browne, writer, homemaker, 35

Authorize stakeout. We, the people, expect more from our elected officials than an average citizen. He or she must be a step above in morals, leadership, integrity. - Armour M. Yon, retired, 65

Authorize stakeout. Her life is an open book. This situation may or may not affect her if she reaches office. However, if she denies the affair and in fact it is true, what will she deny when in office? Besides, Ms. Spenser challenged reporters to follow her. - Tim Lockwood, screenwriter, 22

Stakeout. If the candidate will lie and cheat to her spouse, why should she treat her constituents any differently? - Doctor, 35

Authorize stakeout. If the tip proved valid, I would write the story about how dumb can a candidate be to risk a career for a liaison in a condo. If a person can't even figure out how to have a secret rendezvous, how can he find solutions to much more complicated issues? - P.J. Boyle Jr., realtor, 47

Authorize stakeout. Any responsible newspaper should use any means necessary to expose unacceptable conduct of any candidate running for any public office be it president of U.S. or a clerk of the circuit court. - William A. Redden, retired, 62

No stakeout. These kinds of stakeouts bring shivers of 1984 (George Orwell) to my soul. I believe that if you give people enough rope they'll hang themselves (what goes around comes around). - Robert W. Wasson Jr., business manager, 38

No stakeout. I, myself, have considered renting a condo for a weekend to get some work done. If my workmate were male, who would believe my story if a rumor got started? Rumors regarding personal experiences should be discounted. - School administrator, 45

No stakeout. Don't waste your time and the American people's. Who sleeps with whom is none of our business. Next time stick to the news. Who's in whose bed is not news! - Saleswoman, 32

No stakeout. I think the press as a whole showed heinous lack of professional ethics questioning the sexual ethics of Hart and Bakker. It was a very sad week in the history of journalism. - Norman S. Bie Jr., proofreader (currently unemployed), 31

No stakeout. This behavior is used by the tabloids, not national newspapers. - Louise Caranna

Ask for comment later. You should stick to the kind of thing that you are good at - false innuendo and selected logic to produce erroneous conclusions. They should sue on the basis that the press prevented them from making a livelihood in their chosen profession. - Lee Bennett, retired, 63

Ask for comment later. Do people really believe one would trade years of hard work for a sexual romp? - Susan Gettys, secretary/accountant, 38

Ask for comment later. I would give her the same opportunity to defend herself against a rumor that I would like given to me. - Lucille Santa Maria, home shopping representative, 47

Merely asking about the weekend, casually, will achieve the same effect as staking out the condo looking for mud to sling. - Paul Wilbur, student, 18

Case 2: Family secrets

You are the news director of a local television station. Three years ago, your station covered the story of a young woman who arrived at a hospital emergency room one night with her two children. All were suffering from gunshot wounds. The woman told police she had been driving home on a country highway when a long-haired stranger flagged her down. The man demanded her car keys. When she refused, he shot her and the children and fled into the woods. One of the children died that night; the woman and her 8-year-old daughter, survived, although the girl was left paralyzed. The police were unable to find the gunman and began to turn up other inconsistencies in her story. When the surviving child recovered, she told police, and later testified in court, that her mother did the shooting. The woman was sentenced to prison and lost custody of her daughter, who was placed in a foster home. The story would have probably ended there except for rumors that surfaced last week that the prosecutor in the case is in the process of adopting the child, and that she is already living with his family. Your reporters run into a stone wall when they try to confirm the story, except for pleas from social workers, adoption officials and the prosecutor himself to let the story be. More publicity would harm the child, they argue, and might even jeopardize the adoption. Normally, you wouldn't report an adoption, but you believe this story raises ethical questions and wonder if the adoption is a conflict of interest for the prosecutor. Still, you worry that your story might harm the child's chances for a new life. The town's daily newspaper is also pursuing the story, but hasn't reported it ... yet.

How the readers voted

23%- Broadcast the details of the adoption.

66%- Don't air the story.

9%- Air the story only if another news organization does.

Reader comments

Broadcast the story. Any time you have lawyers, HRS and/or persons with political pull, you have corruption where children are concerned. Yes, we should expose every case we can. So much is hidden. We can't correct what we don't know. - B.G. Wilmot, classified advertising sales, 60

Broadcast the story. Something stinks here. Some underhanded deeds may

have taken place; the prosecutor may be dishonest. - Bryan Robson & Ray Wilkins

Don't air the story. Competition should have no role when the mental health of a child is involved. This is, in effect, making the child a non-person - an object who somehow deserves to be treated as public property. Child abuse is being done whenever a child is hounded to be photographed. Gary Hart can take care of himself, but a child is vulnerable to lifetime scars. - J.C. Nickel

Don't air the story. Having had a mother and father who'd been foster parents for the past 17 years, I know from personal experience the chance of an 8-year-old crippled child getting adopted is extremely slim. The child is lucky enough to find a family. Why risk her chance at a normal life? - Deborah J. Bostock, college newspaper editor, 18

Don't air the story. Where is the conflict of interest? The prosecutor should be commended for adopting the paralyzed girl. - John McGuire, retired, 75

Don't air the story. Do you have positive legal evidence that a breach of ethical policy has been displayed? Is there proof of a conflict of interest? Which is of greater importance, your desire to air the story (ratings) or the happiness of a fellow human being (the child)? - Eleanor V. McGlockton, educator, 45

Don't air the story. The child's well-being comes first. To do a story would only bring more attention to something that should be left alone now. Media has to draw a line between real news and garbage that serves no purpose. Leave it to the Enquirer. - Diane G., maid, 36

Airing the story might hurt the child. - Lori Jameson, student, 14

Wait to see what competition does. Children have got to stop paying for the sins of the parent. For the love of God, if it must be aired, use a little finesse and sensitivity. - Ivy Polk, teacher

If no one reports, the child lives out her life peacefully; yet if someone reports it we're going to report our own. - Billy Willey, student, 17

Case 3: Deceptive Practices

You are the editor of a major metropolitan newspaper. In the mail today is an anonymous letter from the owner of a downtown bar who complains he's had to pay bribes to city inspectors. He's afraid to complain publicly, he says, for fear of retribution. ``I saved for ten years to start my business. They could shut me down in a day.'' He pleads with you to ``expose this corruption.'' You call a meeting of top editors to discuss strategies for getting at the story. The head of your paper's investigative team makes a proposal: ``Let's open a bar ourselves and let them come to us. If they ask for bribes, we'll pay and get it on camera and tape.'' The city editor opposes the plan: ``If the cops did that, we'd blast them for

entrapment. We've got no business posing as anything but what we are. There's only one way to go after this story: with shoeleather. Interview bar owners, every one in the city if we have to. Look for honest inspectors willing to blow the whistle.'' The investigative team editor calls that ``Pollyanna thinking. Payoffs are an open secret in this town. We've written stories for years about bribery; where's it gotten us? No bar owner in his right mind is going to step forward and risk his business, maybe his life. If we want to get these crooks, we've got to catch them in the act.''

How the readers voted

46%- Authorize the undercover operation.

31%- Interview bar owners and inspectors.

14%- Publish the letter and solicit comments from city officials about the bar owner's complaints.

Reader comments

Authorize the undercover operation. If people offer only lip service resistance, we shall forever live under the thumb of oppression. Expose corruption by whatever means. You are not police and you are guardians of the public welfare. Your job is to expose the TRUTH. - Madlyn E. Sanford, office manager, 40

This type of ``sting`` operation is done all the time and in this situation seems to be the best way to get to the truth of the situation since no one will talk about it. - K. Menzel, sales, 26

Go undercover. You're not coming to them - they're coming to you. - Barbara B. Lisher, homemaker, 52

If wrong is being done, the paper's first responsibility is to the public. The ``sting`` is the only real way to find out. - Sales manager, 32

Go undercover. To open a small car repair shop it cost me \$2,500 in payoffs. Later a glass repair business; same kind of a deal. When I filed a complaint to the D.A. my vehicles got so many parking tickets I went out of business. - Sales agent, 80

Crooked public officials feeding at the public trough should be exposed by any means possible. If convicted, they should be jailed and their ill-gotten gains confiscated. If the current laws do not permit this, change the laws. - K. Skinner, retired, 67

Go undercover. Crime is crime anyway you catch 'em. - Lee Thomas Marsh, 17

Choose the ``shoeleather`` approach. There's got to be at least a few honest

people in the city that would help you find out who is doing the bribery. - Keith Grzybek, student, 14

You do not print an anonymous letter. You run a newspaper, not a gossip fence. If, after wearing out several sets of shoes, you see no results, you reconsider. Where public welfare clearly is at stake, strict ethics yield to carefully reasoned, solidly judged risks. - Ron Ogden, journalist, 34

Choose the ``shoeleather`` approach. This is a newspaper not a detective bureau. - David Bean, security supervisor, 60

Choose the ``shoeleather`` approach. It's a good newsperson's job to find the ``canary,`` and take down every ``note.`` We seem to be getting further and further away from our role as reporters, and more into being instigators and creators of news. - Homer T. Ford, retired newsman, 58

Choose the ``shoeleather`` approach. Investigative reporting needs solid and provable evidence. But ``sting`` operations are a police activity; yours is to report news in an unbiased style of reporting. Tell the truth - both sides. - Paul P. Hochberg, retired, 71

Publish the anonymous letter and seek comment from officials. The pen is mightier than the sword. Newspapers are very powerful - the Watergate story - the Gary Hart story - the PTL story etc., etc. Let ``the pen`` expose them. - Loretta MacDonald, homemaker, 67

Publish the anonymous letter. The city should perform the investigation to clean its own house if required. - Carlton Gay, educator, 54

Case 4: Confidential sources

You are the editor of a small suburban newspaper in fierce competition with a metropolitan paper owned by a media conglomerate that has made no secret it wants to take over your advertisers and subscribers. Your police reporter arrives in the newsroom with startling revelations from her law enforcement sources: A former state prosecutor is under investigation for masterminding a cocaine-trafficking ring. Financing was arranged with fraudulent loans arranged by a vice president at your town's largest bank. The owner of a local flight school, a decorated fighter pilot in Vietnam, flew the drugs in from Colombia. It's an explosive story with a major hitch: None of the sources will speak for the record and you have a policy of avoiding the use of unnamed sources. ``Our readers have a right to know where we get our information,`` you tell your reporter. ``Otherwise, they are free to ask, `How can I believe what you tell me, if you won't say who told you?`` You decide against publishing the story unless she can get official confirmation of the investigation with named sources. Two days later, your competitor breaks the story quoting ``confidential law enforcement sources.`` Your staff begs you to publish the story now, but you stand firm: ``We won't destroy people's reputations on the basis of anonymous sources.`` Each

day the competition prints new revelations from its unnamed sources and begins running radio advertisements suggesting your paper is ``covering up`` to protect local big wigs. Some advertisers take their business to the competition. Readers demand to know why you're not printing the story. Your staff is demoralized. Today your reporter says she has a scoop no one else has yet: Investigators have learned that the mayor and the city council president embezzled city funds to buy the plane used by the drug ring. Once again, the story is based on information from unnamed sources. How the readers voted

27%- Publish the story, quoting unnamed sources.

36%- Wait until indictments are announced but write an editorial explaining your position to readers.

28%- Try to confirm the story of the drug ring through other channels: sending a reporter to Colombia; staking out the courthouse and interviewing witnesses as they come out of the grand jury.

Reader comments

Publish using the unnamed sources. If we can assume the ``sources`` are genuine, the information is reliable and I can stand the effect of a libel suit, print the news. A newsman without the courage of his convictions is a sorry specimen indeed. - John B. Lavettre, retired Marine, 65

Journalism is too competitive today to sit back and publish editorials apologizing for not getting the story. Use the unnamed source that has sought you out for the scoop! - Maggie Hall, writer, 29

Not only write an editorial, but also a letter to advertisers to establish your credibility as a hometown team player. It is a good, fair policy, which will ultimately protect those who are innocent. Stick to it! It will pay future dividends! That is what ethics are all about. - Sandie Urie, homemaker, Bible teacher, 49

Wait for indictments and write an editorial. I think that if you have a policy you either stand by it or change it. If you choose to stand by it, explain why. It may not be practical from a business standpoint, but it sure helps when you look in the mirror! - Chris Peterson, estate sales, 40

Wait for indictments. Information ``leaked`` to the media may or may not be true. Once the story goes out, the harm is done. Trial by newspaper should not be encouraged. - Ralph L. Schuler, handyman, 63

Wait for indictments. When you cave in on your first principle, then comes the second, third, etc. Soon no principles at all. - Vernon G. Hacker, retired, 64

Wait for indictments and write an editorial. Your readers deserve to know the paper's stand on the issue. To remain quiet would be a big mistake. As a small

suburban newspaper, you probably could not afford a trip to Colombia. - Ira Howard, word processor, 38

The unnamed sources could be lying. And if they are you could destroy a person's life for no reason. So it would be best to wait until you have evidence of ... - Student, 14

Pursue story through other channels. Something this big you should blow your whole budget on and then some. - D. Perry, resort hotelier, 49

Pursue story through other channels. How do you know your source isn't lying? - Robert MacCaughey, student, 13

Pursue story through other channels. A fair attempt to unravel rumors before printing them is the only ethical and responsible way for a newspaper to behave. - J. Wald, nurse, 48

Pursue story through other channels. If you believe in your principles, stick with them. Don't give up on the story, but don't join your competitor in the gutter, either. Meanwhile, publish that editorial and meet with your staff. Explain why the high road always seems to have so many potholes. - Richard H. Baker, freelance writer, 50

Choices: What four professionals would do

John Haile, 42, editor, Orlando Sentinel. Political reporter, Nashville Tennessean 1967-79. Member, American Society of Newspaper Editors Newspaper of the Future Committee.

Donna Lee Dickerson, Ph.D., 39, associate professor of mass communication, University of South Florida, Tampa. Teaches communications law. Author, Florida Media Law.

Andrew Barnes, 48, editor and president, St. Petersburg Times. Writer and editor, Washington Post 1965-73. Chairman, American Society of Newspaper Editors Ethics Committee.

Holly Steuart, 31, news director, WTOG-Channel 44, St. Petersburg. Reporter, producer, anchor, WTEN-TV, Albany, N.Y., 1977-84.

CASE 1

Stakeout

DICKERSON: Stake out the candidate. A large portion of our population makes decisions at the polls based on personal morals and a lot of people think that is very important, more important than where a candidate stands on the Iran-Contra story or missiles. When morality or personal morals are in question the media

have to follow up. However, if they stake out and find nothing - that should be reported as well. Perhaps the media were at fault for not reporting on Kennedy and FDR. I suspect that were they living today, the media would go after them if the question were raised. BARNES: Ask Spenser about the tip after the weekend. This is different from the Hart case. It's a sexy story but it doesn't bear on whether she is an appropriate candidate. The extent to which Hart was determined to present himself as a family man while being a bachelor playboy made it the public's business. I think that the question of character - what kind of a person is this? - is entirely legitimate but I think that we all have private aspects of our lives and that to make me want to describe what somebody is doing in a condominium on a weekend takes a good deal of public action. STEUART: Stake out the candidate. I think the character issue is a legitimate campaign issue. You do have to be sensitive to people's personal lives, but public figures live in a fishbowl and have to open themselves up to scrutiny that fits our time. Public leaders have to set examples, just as parents set examples for children. HAILE: None of the above. This isn't Gary Hart, and doesn't merit the Hart treatment. There is no history of questions about Martha Spenser's integrity. She hasn't been waging a campaign based on her image as a ``family`` person. What she has done is go on record that she is not having an affair. If she's lying, that is an issue. A stakeout isn't likely to give us that answer. Advisers have been known to consult on weekends. I would have a reporter knock on the door Sunday and ask about the campaign just to be sure if he was there. I don't see this leading to an immediate story but it may be information we'll need later if this becomes a major issue.

CASE 2

Family secrets

BARNES: Broadcast the story. The question of what the competition is doing is irrelevant; I'll be hung by what I do. This is a question of potential abuse of public power over someone who has no other line of defense than the news media. It's the responsibility of a newspaper to print, of a television station to broadcast, and try and do it in a way that will minimize the harm to a child. If you can mask the identity of the child you do so but it's crucial that we always monitor abuse of public power. STEUART: Broadcast the story. Perhaps this prosecutor is really being a good Samaritan. But I think that it needs to be reported because there is what seems to me to be a potential conflict of interest. After all, the prosecutor is in the position to send the mother away and get the child. Publicity of any kind has the chance to hurt someone but it might help the child make sure that everything's on the up and up if it's out in the public light. DICKERSON: Don't air the story. I don't think this is one of those major issues that calls for balancing away privacy in the name of a good story. I think the privacy interest here is much greater than the story to be gained. If there's some kind of a conflict of interest there, that's small potatoes in terms of the major harm to the child and to the family. It's not that big a story. The greater good is not in the story; it's in leaving it alone. HAILE: Broadcast the story. One way or another this is a story.

The station's reporters have some work to do: they need to find out whether the prosecutor has used his position to adopt a child that might have been better placed in another home. I would like to think that this will turn out to be a heartwarming story of a family touched by a child desperately in need of a home. Either way, the arguments that the child will be hurt or that the adoption process could be threatened aren't convincing. The family of the child and the adoption people know the story. Only the public doesn't know the outcome. I would tell them.

CASE 3

Deceptive practices

STEUART: Authorize the undercover operation. The bribery is just so accepted that you might need something a little more controversial to get people interested. I don't think it's entrapment because we're not police. If we were to go out and under our own names open a bar and if people solicited us for payoffs, that's not entrapment; that's a legitimate story. HAILE: Interview bar owners and inspectors. Reach for some comfortable shoes. I don't think we have any business practicing this kind of deception. Particularly when it puts us in the position - by paying bribes - of breaking the law ourselves. At best the reporter is going to be spending time in court at a time when we work hard to avoid testifying in all kinds of cases. We may well have to protect some of our sources by not naming them. But my guess is that we can find the people needed to make this a story. BARNES: Interview bar owners and inspectors. I'm for shoeleather. A news organization has the capacity to find out what's going on and a responsibility to do so. To go undercover risks so diminishing the believability of the report because of the lies that were committed in obtaining it that I'm unwilling to do it. I'm not prepared to say there will never be a case where we should masquerade but it's been more than 20 years and I haven't yet found one. So far there has always been a way that allowed me to find out what was going on without having to lie. DICKERSON: Interview bar owners and inspectors. You wear a lot of holes in your shoes. Only as a very last resort do you go undercover. It's a lot easier to get this story by setting up the bar, but the story could be done over a longer period of time with a lot of good solid reporting. If the press requires honesty and accountability from businesses and governments, then the public has a right to expect it from our reporters too. You can't use the First Amendment to break the law.

CASE 4

Confidential sources

HAILE: None of the above. Each newspaper has to set its own standards. There are no universal rules that can be applied automatically to every story. Personally I would have gone with the first story using the unnamed sources. This is a major story of major impact on the community. If we had multiple sources, reliable

sources, than I would have published. DICKERSON: Wait for the indictments. We need to be accountable to our readers and if we're going to give information, then they need to be able to judge whether it's accurate or not by the source. By waiting for indictments readers would be given the most accurate information about that story. On the question of the competition breaking the story, good ethics should never take a backseat to the almighty dollar. STEUART: Publish quoting unnamed sources. Unnamed sources are at the foundation of a free press. Whenever possible I would want sources on the record and I would exhaust all avenues to get them, but if the only way to get the story out is through unnamed sources that's your only option. In broadcast we would go on the air with a silhouette interview if the reporter and I had a clear understanding as to that person's identity and believability. That would be my only reservation: How good are the sources? BARNES: Wait until indictments are announced and pursue story through other channels. Presumably the unnamed sources are law enforcement sources. The way law enforcement sources make accusations is to indict. Let them indict and I'll print it. I have terrible discomfort with printing accusations that people haven't got solid enough to have gone before a court and made them. The number of abusive accusations I have seen continues to haunt me. Having just moralistically said that what the opposition is doing makes no difference if you're behind on an important story, the reality is that boy, do you ever start scrambling.

[Illustration]

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO, (4); Caption: Andrew Barnes; Holly Steuart; John Haile; Donna Lee Dickerson

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Abstract (Document Summary)

You are the executive editor of the state's largest newspaper, known for its aggressive investigative reporting. The paper's political editor has received a tip in an anonymous phone call about Martha Spenser, the Republican candidate for the Senate and the front-runner in the 1988 race. The tip concerns rumors plaguing the campaign that Spenser, who is married, is having an affair with a former priest who now is an activist lawyer in your city. Spenser has publicly confronted the rumors before, and insisted the lawyer is just a trusted adviser. This weekend, the tipster says, Spenser and the lawyer have rented a beach condo. You and top editors debate how to approach the story. Some editors want to assign a team of reporters to stake out the condo to see if Spenser spends the weekend alone with the lawyer. ``The woman's character is a legitimate campaign issue and this speaks to it directly,`` one editor argues. Besides, she says, Spenser has even challenged reporters to ``follow me around for a couple of days. I have nothing to hide.`` Other editors oppose the idea, saying it unfairly invades the candidate's privacy. ``We knew Jack Kennedy had affairs, but we

never printed it. FDR had a mistress, but that never was news. A candidate has a right to a private life.`` What's your decision? How the Readers Voted