

ENSURING QUALITY

Like Susie, I think this is a really cool idea.

Paul E. Steiger, who was the top editor of The Wall Street Journal for 16 years, and a pair of wealthy Californians are assembling a group of investigative journalists who will give away their work to media outlets.

The nonprofit group, called Pro Publica, will pitch each project to a newspaper or magazine (and occasionally to other media) where the group hopes the work will make the strongest impression. The plan is to do long-term projects, uncovering misdeeds in government, business and organizations.

But I'm just as interested by the dilemma it will present traditional media: how will they assess this content? Cue Bill Keller making a typically idiotic comment that demonstrates what I mean:

Bill Keller, executive editor of The New York Times, said The Times would be open to using work from an outside source, "assuming we were confident of its quality," but that "we'll always have a preference for work we can vouch for ourselves."

How is it that an entire industry of people paid to write and think critically cannot imagine how they would go about assessing the quality of a text they didn't write themselves? How is it that Bill Keller, with a lifetime career in journalism, couldn't look at an investigative article and assess whether it was great or was crap? How is that Bill Keller, who presided over Judy Miller's demise and has been saddled with Michael Gordon's credulous reporting of late, puts so much stock in the NYT's ability to vouch for themselves the quality of journalistic work.