



White House News Photographers' Association

Susan Walsh
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Washington, DC 20044
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Dear Industry Leader,

As President of the White House News Photographers' Association, I am asking for your help in significantly reducing the number of "official" photo releases that are distributed and used by news organizations. This practice is significantly impacting our ability as photojournalists to independently gather and disseminate news in the visual format.

The Bush administration has made it a habit of providing official photo releases from events that could have easily accommodated press coverage. Last month, the White House scheduled five photo releases in one week. The WHNPA has informed the White House of our opposition to this policy. However, if we want to change this policy, we will all have to join forces. Please help us to keep open doors for press coverage.

As long as news organizations continue to accept these photo releases, we will continue to be excluded from events in favor of "official" photos. Governments and event organizers have every incentive in the world to encourage the distribution and use of photo releases—they have total control over their image, literally. At British Prime Minister Tony Blair's news conference in Scotland following the July 7 attacks, coverage was official photo only. (A Financial Times photographer filled in because the official G8 photographer was unavailable.)

Photo releases are no different than press releases. Journalists are not expected to regurgitate the information verbatim from press releases. Why then should we allow government approved images to pass as legitimate news? These images are carefully scrutinized and approved by those providing them.

When the White House earlier this year tried to provide prepared video packages, the broadcast industry was in an uproar--rightfully so. However, why are we not equally upset when we are provided carefully prepared still images?

The majority of the public does not know the difference between a news photo and a photo release. Despite attempts to clearly identify photo releases in the caption, many publications simply identify the photo by the agency that provided it. Do we really know for sure that the photos provided are accurate and not manipulated for content?

Our bylines are our credibility.

We should strongly discourage the acceptance and use of photo releases. If they are to be used, they should have a mandatory credit stating that they are government-approved photos. Official photo

releases should be used only in the most extreme of circumstances. We must send a very loud and very clear message: photo releases are not acceptable.

I look forward to working with in an effort to address this issue.

Sincerely,

Susan Walsh