



# White House News Photographers Association

November 16, 2005

Dear WHNPA members,

Last month, I met with Press Secretary Scott McClellan and Assistant Press Secretary Josh Deckard about White House photo releases.

Josh has agreed to question every time the President's schedule lists an event as "Photo Release" only. He is also responsible for trying to work the schedule to see if photographers can be allowed in. I think this is a great step in the right direction.

Our previous WHNPA letter to the White House was influential in allowing the travel pool still photographers to make photos as President Bush looked out the window of Air Force One while surveying the damage from Hurricane Katrina. My understanding is that this was the first time since 9/11 that photographers were allowed up front on Air Force One to photograph Bush.

Unfortunately, several newspapers, including the LA Times, USA Today, and one local paper, used the White House handout version provided by Getty rather than using the other variety of independent images available.

In the meeting, I pointed out that with the significant numbers of White House "photo releases," White House photographers are crossing the line from documentary photographers to White House PR photographers. During this Bush administration, more than 450 handout photos have been provided to news organizations averaging 1.8 photos per week. In comparison, the Clinton White House provided approximately 100 photo releases through two terms.

While I am encouraged that the White House is listening, it is worth noting that three days after our meeting, the White House released a photo of President Bush meeting with Bono of U2. When questioned why photographers were excluded, the White House response was that Bono's people did not want press coverage. We now know who calls the shots on press coverage of the President. It is also disappointing to note that when this photo was published in one of our local papers, the credit on the handout photo was, Eric Draper/Associated Press. As we all know, Eric has not worked for the AP since 2001 when he left to work for President Bush.

As long as independent photojournalists are excluded from coverage of the daily activities of the President, coverage of the White House is compromised. Our credibility is further deteriorated when these handout images are published with incorrect credits. Can you imagine the controversy if reporters routinely misidentified their sources and their quotes?

If we truly want to improve coverage at the White House and maintain credibility as journalists, we must press the decision makers at our news organizations not to use handout photos and strongly encourage independent press coverage of the daily activities of the President.

I am asking those photojournalists who cover the White House to please help me to keep track of occasions where coverage should have been or should be open. Scott has agreed to keep open this dialog on this important issue so we must continue to press for independent coverage of President Bush.

I am please to announce that the White House Correspondents Association and the National Press Photographers Association strongly support our position on handout photos. Both organizations have promised to support our efforts to influence change throughout the industry on the use of handout photos.

Together, hopefully, we can help improve coverage, reduce the number of handout photos, and increase our credibility as visual journalists.

Susan Walsh  
President,  
White House News Photographers Association