

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

July 22, 2009

John Harrington
White House News Photographers Association
7119 Ben Franklin Station
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mr. Harrington:

Thank you for your note. I value the relationship that this White House has with the photojournalists who cover the administration, and I'm committed to maintaining an open channel of communication about the access you seek.

I'm pleased that in the first few months of this administration, we've negotiated agreements to give unique behind-the-scenes access to photojournalists from outlets like Time, Newsweek, New York Times, Politico and Vanity Fair. We're engaged in discussions with other outlets to create more opportunities like this for other news photographers.

In previous conversations about the importance of giving independent photojournalists access to presidential events, you suggested that official photographs are a poor substitute for a pool spray, because the outlets you serve won't publish what you describe as "handouts". However, there are several examples of outlets doing exactly that. In fact, your outlets have published photos distributed by several foreign governments including Germany, Venezuela, Russia and Israel.

Your letter also suggests that it is "just as quick and easy" to allow the pool to document the President's activities as it is to allow a White House photographer into the room. That's not correct. While it's true that the disruption of the stills pool is typically minimal, it's also true that - on occasion - the President's busy schedule is not able to accommodate even a minor disruption and delay.

However, because of this President's and this administration's belief in the benefits of transparent government, we'll continue to strive to give access to the President as frequently as practicable to photojournalists who are covering the White House. And when we can't, we'll continue to distribute the high-quality work of Pete Souza and his team. Taken together - the commitment to access for news photographers and the prolific White House Photo office - we're pleased with the success we've had in making this administration transparent and accessible to the American people.

Thanks for your diligence in covering the White House, and I look forward to continuing to work with you as you do it.

Sincerely,



Robert Gibbs
White House Press Secretary