

Mr. Josh Earnest
White House Press Secretary
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Sept. 12, 2016

Dear Mr. Earnest,

Last December, a delegation representing more than 50 journalism and government accountability organizations [met with you at the White House](#) to express deep concern about, and urge greater openness and transparency from, the federal government.

The meeting followed at least five years of work done by various organizations to study government transparency and the role public information officers (PIOs) play in relaying important information to the American people.

In a recent [New York Times letter to the editor](#), you urged journalists to give President Obama credit for government transparency. You highlight some of the ways the Obama administration has improved transparency in the White House.

Yet, the 50-plus groups repeatedly outlined to the administration various ways transparency has gotten worse, including:

- Officials blocking reporters' requests to talk to specific staff people;
- Excessive delays in answering interview requests that stretch past reporters' deadlines;
- Officials conveying information "on background," refusing to give reporters what should be public information unless they agree not to say who is speaking;
- Federal agencies blackballing reporters who write critically of them.
- A continued lack of meaningful visual access to the President by an independent press pool

You say in your letter that effective advocacy means giving credit where it is due. That will happen when journalists believe meaningful improvements have been made. The actions the Obama administration has taken to invite journalists to cover the President's formal remarks at fund-raisers, information being made available on data.gov and releasing names of White House visitors are all steps in the right direction. But they're not enough. And we believe the problems outweigh what you are calling accomplishments.

We are extremely disappointed that, despite a promise to get back to us after that meeting at the White House on Dec. 15, 2015, we have yet to hear anything from you. We are disappointed that, nine months later, nothing has improved. We are disappointed that, as we rapidly approach the election of a new president, we cannot use the Obama administration as an example of how it should be done. To rephrase your last question – if this President's transparency effort is such a disappointment and the press does not object why would future administrations consider being more open?

But we do object. President Obama may be leaving the White House, but we aren't going anywhere. Our promise to the American people is to keep fighting for their right to know what their elected officials are up to. To keep fighting for information and images they need to know and see to live their best, most informed, lives as American citizens.

It's the least we can do.

Sincerely,

American Copy Editors Society

American Society of Journalists & Authors

American Society of News Editors

Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists Association

Asian American Journalists Association

Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

Association of Alternative Newsmedia

Association of Opinion Journalists

Bill of Rights Defense Committee & Defending Dissent Foundation

CCTV Center for Media & Democracy

Center for Scholastic Journalism

College Media Association

Colorado Press Women

Colorado Press Women

Committee to Protect Journalists

Demand Progress

Freedom of the Press Foundation

Inter American Press Association

iSolon.org

Journalism and Women Symposium

Journalism Education Association

Local Independent Online News Publishers

National Association of Black Journalists

National Association of Hispanic Journalists

National Association of Science Writers
National Federation of Press Women
National Press Photographers Association
National Scholastic Press Association
National Writers Association
Native American Journalists Association
New England First Amendment Coalition
The Poynter Institute
Radio Television Digital News Association
Religion News Association
Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press
Reporters Without Borders
Society of Environmental Journalists
Society of Professional Journalists
Student Press Law Center
Tully Center for Free Speech
UNITY: Journalists for Diversity

Cc: President Barack Obama