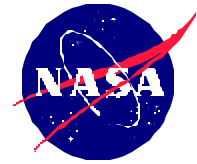


National Aeronautics and
Space Administration

Office of Inspector General
Headquarters
Washington, D.C. 20546-0001



Reply to Attn of: Office of Inspector General

February 4, 2000

The Honorable F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.
Chairman, Committee on Science
U.S. House of Representatives
Suite 2320, Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6301

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In response to your November 10, 1999 letter (Appendix A), my office has reviewed issues associated with NASA's decision to reject *NASA Watch's* application for press accreditation.

I. BACKGROUND

The mission of the NASA Headquarters Public Affairs Office (PAO) is to "provide for the widest practicable and appropriate dissemination of information to news media and the general public concerning the objectives, methods, and results of NASA programs."¹ The Associate Administrator for Public Affairs, who heads the NASA Headquarters PAO, is charged with leading "an Agency-wide program to establish and maintain open and credible communications channels to the news media and the general public involving all Headquarters Program Offices and Centers."

NASA's Centers each have a PAO that report to the Center Director, but generally follow policies set by the Headquarters PAO. NASA's PAOs award credentials to members of the media, allowing them to attend NASA press briefings, gain increased access to NASA officials, and use NASA facilities open to the press. The vast majority of NASA press credentials are requested for events at Kennedy Space Center, Johnson Space Center, and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Because space available for journalists is limited during the high-profile media events that occur at these Centers, almost all rejections of applications for NASA press credentials are made by these Center PAOs.

NASA has historically employed a relatively informal process to evaluate applications for press accreditation. Although policies vary from Center to Center, NASA essentially grants press credentials only to journalists working for "legitimate" news gathering organizations.

¹ NASA Organization Handbook. NHB 1101.3

NASA officials generally request that new applications for press credentials be in the form of a letter on the letterhead of a news organization. Based on their personal knowledge of the news organization or the reporter, and their estimation of whether the news organization appears to be "legitimate," NASA officials then determine whether an applicant should be accredited.

NASA Watch is a web site² that has published information about NASA and non-NASA space activities on a daily basis since 1996. *NASA Watch* evolved from an earlier web site, *NASA RIF Watch*, that focused on potential layoffs at NASA. *NASA Watch* has a single editor but incorporates news items provided by numerous sources, including NASA employees. Typical items published on *NASA Watch* include links to articles, reports, and press releases published elsewhere on the web; previously unpublished information forwarded to *NASA Watch* by NASA (or NASA contractor) employees; news about Congressional activities; and editorials. *NASA Watch* frequently questions—and occasionally lampoons—NASA actions.

The editor of *NASA Watch* has twice applied for press accreditation from NASA and was rejected both times. The first application was a verbal request to NASA Headquarters PAO for credentials to attend the launch of the Mars Pathfinder spacecraft in June 1997. That request was verbally rejected on the grounds that *NASA Watch* was not legitimate press but rather was closer to a "vanity press." The editor of *NASA Watch* again applied (via email) for press credentials to NASA Headquarters PAO in July 1999 (see Appendix B) and was again rejected (see Appendix C) on the grounds that *NASA Watch* did not meet the PAO's new policy for press accreditation (see Appendix D). NASA has no formal process for appealing rejection of press credentials.

In part because of *NASA Watch's* continuing efforts to gain press credentials, the PAO is reassessing its policy for press accreditation and has formed a team to recommend changes to the policy. The team has been asked to evaluate the current accreditation process to make sure that internet reporters are treated the same as journalists from other mediums.³ (Appendix E contains management's full charge to the team.)⁴

² <http://www.reston.com/nasa/watch.html>

³ NASA PAO is not the only organization that has had difficulty determining whether non-traditional internet-based journalists should receive press credentials. For example, the press galleries for the 1996 Democrat and Republican party conventions denied press credentials to America Online, which did not fit into any of the four press gallery classifications of news organizations (newspapers, radio and TV stations, magazines, and photographers.)

⁴ The charge states that the team should include representatives from the media, but the PAO has told us that the team currently consists solely of three PAO employees (one from Kennedy Space Center, one from Johnson Space Center, and one from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory). Recently, however, the team met with seven members of the space press corps to discuss potential changes to the accreditation policy, and the PAO has told us that they plan to add a media representative to the team.

II. RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

In your letter, you raised five questions regarding NASA's policies and procedures for press accreditation and how they were applied to *NASA Watch's* application.

1. How many applications for press accreditation has NASA rejected since June 1997, when *NASA Watch* first applied for credentials?

NASA typically receives anywhere from several hundred to several thousand applications for press credentials each year, some for event-specific credentials and some for long-duration (one year) credentials. The Agency does not maintain a central file recording the disposition of press accreditation applications. The NASA Headquarters PAO told us they were aware of approximately 6 to 12 rejections of applications for press credentials annually. This figure may not include every rejection by all of the NASA Centers, so the total number of applications rejected may be somewhat higher.

A list of applications for press credentials rejected by NASA since *NASA Watch* first applied was assembled by NASA Headquarters PAO (based on inputs provided by the news chiefs at Kennedy Space Center, Johnson Space Center and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory) and is attached (Appendix F). The PAO told us that this list was not definitive but was, rather, a cursory summary. The list of rejected applications is short but diverse. Among the rejected applications were those for a reporter's sister, a journalist who could not prove he had an assignment, and the "alien-babes.com" web site.

2. Was NASA's rejection of *NASA Watch's* application in August 1999 consistent with the guidelines in place at the time that *NASA Watch* applied for credentials?

As described in the "Background" section of this letter, NASA has historically employed a relatively informal process to evaluate applications for press accreditation. Although (as discussed below) *NASA Watch's* application was rejected based on a newly developed written policy, NASA officials stated that the rejection of *NASA Watch's* application was consistent with the informal guidelines in place at the time of the application.

Because the guidelines for press credentials in place at the time of *NASA Watch's* application were essentially subjective and unwritten, we cannot determine conclusively whether the rejection of *NASA Watch's* application was consistent with those guidelines. However, given that (1) NASA rejects very few applications for press accreditation and is generally flexible in its determination of what constitutes a legitimate news organization;⁵ (2) *NASA Watch's* application explained that the publication is widely read⁶ and recognized by other members of the media;^{7,8} (3) PAO had given press credentials to other web-based publications;⁹ and

⁵ See the response to question 5 for examples.

⁶ *NASA Watch's* application stated that *NASA Watch* is read regularly "...from all NASA centers, the White House... other agencies, Congress, the aerospace industry, reporters for the 'legitimate' press... people from countries and locations around the world - including Antarctica. Readership is growing, not fading."

(4) the application was supported by several print and electronic media journalists,¹⁰ it appears that NASA made an uncharacteristically strict ruling when it denied press credentials to *NASA Watch*.

3. Did NASA reject *NASA Watch's* application for press accreditation without first inquiring if *NASA Watch* met NASA's criteria for awarding credentials?

NASA based its August 1999 rejection of *NASA Watch's* application for press credentials on a newly-developed written policy for accrediting media representatives (see Appendix C). NASA officials indicated that the new policy was developed subsequent to *NASA Watch's* request for accreditation. The officials stated that the new policy was based on the previous informal policy but had been expanded following an examination of other press accreditation policies within the Government and discussions with other Government press offices.¹¹

The primary reason given for NASA's August 4, 1999 rejection of *NASA Watch's* application was that *NASA Watch* was not a "legitimate news gathering organization." The August 1999 accreditation policy defined a legitimate news gathering organization as one that meets the following four criteria:

⁷ In his 1999 application for press credentials, *NASA Watch's* editor stated that *NASA Watch* has been cited by The Sunday Times (London), The New York Times, The Boston Globe, The Houston Chronicle, The Detroit Free Press, Knight-Ridder Newspapers, Nature, Government Executive Magazine, Gannett News Service, MSNBC, Aerospace Daily, IEEE Spectrum Magazine, San Jose Mercury News, The Philadelphia Inquirer, The San Diego Union Tribune, St. Paul/Minneapolis Pioneer Planet, Spokesman Review, ABC, USA Today, Florida Today, Space News, New Scientist, The Age (Australia), and Space.com. Some of the cited articles were about the *NASA Watch* site; others noted that *NASA Watch* had been the first to report breaking news stories.

⁸ *NASA Watch* was also recognized at least once as a news organization by the NASA PAO during the time frame in which accreditation was being considered. The PAO's collection of press clippings "NASA Current News" for July 27, 1999 (Issue 99-141) contained excerpts from *NASA Watch*.

⁹ Among the journalists from web-based publications given NASA press credentials prior to *NASA Watch's* 1999 application were author Tom Clancy, writing for Microsoft's (now defunct) "Mungo Park" adventure travel web site, Wired news, Space.com, and a reporter for "Festival," the web site of college football's Fiesta Bowl.

¹⁰ Some of these letters of support (many of which were sent to NASA PAO) are collected at <http://www.reston.com/nasa/comments/07.24.99.press.comments.html>. NASA PAO has told us that they also received emails recommending that *NASA Watch* not be given credentials. However, they were unable to provide these emails to us.

¹¹ In its rejection of *NASA Watch's* application, NASA PAO maintained that the new policy was "consistent with" the accreditation policies of the Congressional press galleries, the White House, and other government agencies. We found that the policies of these organizations varied significantly. The Congressional press galleries apply criteria similar to those in the new NASA policy, but a committee of members of the press, elected by the press, determines who will receive credentials. The Department of Energy does not issue press credentials, but simply asks members of the press to sign-in at its events. The White House Press Office decides who will receive White House press credentials. The Department of Defense has different standards for journalists who want office space at the Pentagon, journalists who visit the Pentagon frequently, and journalists who want to attend a single press conference. Department of Defense officials told us that they would issue credentials to a one-person web-based operation based primarily on their judgement of whether the site provides useful information to the public.

- a) *it publishes or broadcasts on a regular basis,*
- b) *represents a collective, organizational editorial voice, not simply the offerings of a single individual,*
- c) *engages in first-hand reporting on NASA-related news events, AND*
- d) *its employee(s) or representative(s) requesting accreditation devote their chief attention to— or derive more than one half their earned income from— the gathering and reporting of news.*

PAO officials stated they did not inquire as to whether *NASA Watch* met these criteria before denying its editor's application for press accreditation. The officials indicated that it is not their policy to ask for proof of whether an organization meets the criteria that defines a legitimate news gathering organization. The PAO officials also stated they did not need to inquire whether *NASA Watch* met the criteria because they had personal knowledge that *NASA Watch's* editor did not “. . . devote his chief attention to—or derive more than half of his earned income from—the gathering and reporting of news.” They told us that they also knew that *NASA Watch* did not have a formal news gathering organization of reporters and editors, but rather represented the offerings of a single individual.¹²

However, the editor of *NASA Watch* told us that he believes *NASA Watch* meets all of the criteria listed in the policy. He stated that *NASA Watch* publishes frequently, represents the work of many people (including a large number of NASA employees who provide leads, documents, stories, and other information), and engages in first-hand reporting of NASA-related news events. In addition, he told us that he devotes his chief attention to the gathering and reporting of news.¹³

¹² In its rejection of *NASA Watch's* application, NASA PAO explained that they had given press credentials to web-based news organizations with more traditional structures, including Wired, MSNBC, space.com, ABC.com, and Florida Today's online service.

¹³ It can be argued that *NASA Watch's* editor also derived "more than one half of his earned income" from the gathering and reporting of news. At the time of his application for press credentials, *NASA Watch's* editor derived the majority of his income from his role as webmaster of the *Genomics: A Global Resource* web site (<http://www.phrma.org/genomics/>). This site, co-sponsored by the Pharmaceutical Researchers and manufacturers of America and the American Institute of Biological Sciences, collects and organizes news and other information about genetics.

4. How has NASA verified that those media entities currently credentialed by NASA meet the criteria that NASA cited in denying *NASA Watch's* application?

NASA has not verified that media entities holding current press credentials meet the criteria NASA cited in denying *NASA Watch's* application (i.e., the new written policy). NASA public affairs officials stated that they do not have sufficient resources to retroactively investigate past applications for press credentials.

5. Has NASA granted press credentials to any entities that did not meet NASA's criteria for press accreditation at the time of their application or subsequent to receiving credentials from NASA?

NASA officials told us that there have been instances where press accreditation was granted to individuals who did not meet their criteria. The officials indicated that *NASA Watch's* initial request for accreditation in June 1997 caused them to pay greater attention to the issue of who should be granted press accreditation. The NASA officials stated that since 1997, the process of ensuring that applicants meet the criteria has improved.

To get a sense of how rigorously NASA enforces its guidelines for press accreditation, we reviewed a list of 283 individuals given press credentials for a recent Shuttle launch (STS-93) at Kennedy Space Center. Our review revealed that NASA appeared to be flexible in its definition of what constituted a "legitimate news organization." For example, twenty-three individuals given credentials for the launch were affiliated with aerospace corporations rather than dedicated news gathering organizations;¹⁴ one affiliation was reported as "unknown;" one was a representative of a natural gas and electric company; and one was reporting for "Festival," the web site of college football's Fiesta Bowl.

III. CONCLUSION

NASA PAO rarely rejects applications for press credentials and appears to sometimes be lenient in its interpretation of what constitutes "legitimate press." However, when *NASA Watch's* editor applied for press credentials in August 1999, the PAO developed a new policy for press accreditation and cited this policy to deny him credentials. The PAO did not inquire whether *NASA Watch* met the new policy's requirements for accreditation before issuing its denial. The PAO is currently reassessing its policy for press accreditation and has formed a team to recommend changes to the policy.

¹⁴ Of the 23 individuals from industrial corporations given press credentials for the STS-93 launch, six were from TRW, five from Boeing, five from Daimler Chrysler, and five from Ball Aerospace. Some of these individuals may have been representing company newsletters. Others were credentialed so that they could be available to answer press questions about the Shuttle or one of its payloads.

We hope this information fully responds to your inquiry. Should you or your staff want to discuss these issues further, please feel free to call me at (202) 358-1220.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roberta L. Gross". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R' and 'G'.

Roberta L. Gross
Inspector General

6 Enclosures

Appendix A: Letter requesting OIG review

Appendix B: *NASA Watch's* 1999 application for press credentials

Appendix C: NASA's August 1999 rejection of *NASA Watch's* application for press credentials

Appendix D: August 1999 policy on press accreditation

Appendix E: Charge to NASA team reviewing accreditation policy

Appendix F: Partial list of rejected applications for NASA press credentials

Appendix A
Letter Requesting OIG Review

NAME OF MEMBER NAME STATE PARTY POSITION

BERNARD L. BOEHLERT New York
 JAMES SMITH Texas
 STANFORD A. MORELLA Maryland
 CURT WELDON Pennsylvania
 DANA ROHRBAUGH California
 JOE BARTON Texas
 KEN CALVERT California
 MIKE SMITH Michigan
 RUSCOE G. BARTLETT Maryland
 JEROME J. EHLERS Michigan
 DAVE WELDON Florida
 GIL DUFFENBACH Minnesota
 THOMAS M. EMWIG Illinois
 CHRIS CANNON Utah
 KEVIN BRADY Texas
 MERRILL COOK Utah
 GEORGE E. NETHERCUTT, JR. Washington
 FRANK D. LUCAS Oklahoma
 MARK GREEN Wisconsin
 STEVEN T. KUPKENDALL California
 GARY G. MILLER California
 JUDY BIGGERT Illinois
 MARSHALL "MARK" SANFORD South Carolina
 JACK METCALF Washington

U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
 COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE

SUITE 2320 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6301

(202) 225-6371

TTY: (202) 225-4410

<http://www.house.gov/science/welcome.htm>

PAUL H. HALL, Texas
 Ranking Member

BART GORDON, Tennessee
 JERRY F. COSTELLO, Illinois
 JAMES A. BARGIA, Michigan
 EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON, Texas
 LYNN C. WOOLSEY, California
 LYNN W. RIVERS, Michigan
 JOE LOFGREN, California
 MICHAEL F. DOYLE, Pennsylvania
 THELA JACKSON LEE, Texas
 OSBIE STABENDY, Michigan
 ROB ETHERIDGE, North Carolina
 MICK LAMPSON, Texas
 JOHN B. LARSON, Connecticut
 MARK UDALL, Colorado
 DAVID WU, Oregon
 ANTHONY D. WEINER, New York
 MICHAEL E. CAPUANO, Massachusetts
 BRIAN BARD, Washington
 JOSEPH M. HOEFFEL, Pennsylvania
 DENNIS MOORE, Kansas

November 10, 1999

The Honorable Roberta Gross
 Inspector General
 NASA Headquarters, Code W
 Washington, DC 20546

Dear Ms. Gross:

Over the last few months I have reviewed NASA's policies regarding press accreditation. Those policies and NASA's implementation of them have raised several concerns, which I have expressed to the Administrator. In July of this year, the on-line publication NASAWatch applied to NASA Headquarters for press credentials. That request was denied after NASA officials decided that NASAWatch did not meet NASA's "criteria" for receiving press credentials. However, NASA apparently established its criteria after NASAWatch's request and NASA did not request, or receive, sufficient information to determine if NASAWatch met its criteria. Consequently, NASA's action created the appearance that it denied NASAWatch press credentials because NASA did not agree with the content of NASAWatch or its editorial positions. With this in mind, I am asking your office to review some of the issues associated with NASA's decision to reject NASAWatch's press application.

First, how many applications for press accreditation has NASA rejected since June 1997, when NASAWatch first applied for credentials? Second, was NASA's rejection of NASAWatch's application in August 1999 consistent with the guidelines in place at the time that NASAWatch applied for credentials? Third, did NASA reject NASAWatch's application for press accreditation without first inquiring if NASAWatch met NASA's criteria for awarding credentials? Fourth, how has NASA verified that those media entities currently credentialed by NASA meet the criteria that NASA cited in denying NASAWatch's application? Fifth, has NASA granted press credentials to any entities that did not meet NASA's criteria for press accreditation at the time of their application or subsequent to receiving credentials from NASA?

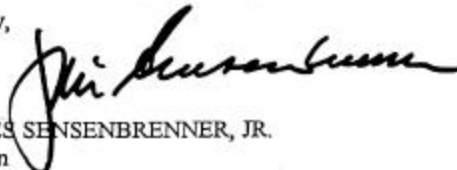
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The Honorable Roberta Gross
November 10, 1999
Page two

I raise these issues because I believe that accountability improves agency performance. Media scrutiny of government organizations and actions promotes accountability. Any time a government agency reduces the scrutiny to which it is subject, it threatens the principle of accountability. Therefore, I think it is important to determine if NASA has acted consistently in this area.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please contact Eric Sterner of the Science Committee staff at (202) 225-7802 if you have any questions or require additional information.

Sincerely,



F. JAMES SENSENBRENNER, JR.
Chairman

FJS/ers

Appendix B

NASA Watch's 1999 Request for Press Credentials

24 July 1999

Ms. Peggy Wilhide
Associate Administrator for Public Affairs
NASA Headquarters
Washington DC 20546

Dear Peggy:

In June 1997 I made a request for press accreditation to Brian Welch at NASA PAO so that I could cover the Mars Pathfinder landing at JPL. After considering it for several days, Mr. Welch informed me that he was going to deny my request on the grounds that I was not 'legitimate' press and that what I was doing was more of a "vanity press" than anything else he could think to compare it to. Mr. Welch suggested that I get a "genuine writing assignment" from an "established news publication" and then get back to him for a reassessment of his decision.

Once again I am requesting press accreditation as editor of NASA Watch.

One of the reasons given to me by Mr. Welch for my non-accreditation was the fact that NASA Watch is only a website with no link to a traditional print publication. There was a rather prominent precedent even back then, one rather prominently featured [1] [2] in wire stories several years ago. Reporters for the STS-81 website hosted by Mungo Park, (which has since become somewhat inactive), Microsoft's web-only publication (featuring reporting by mega-millionaire writer Tom Clancy), were given full press accreditation by NASA at both KSC and JSC.

For that matter the president of the "I Dream of Jeannie Fan Club" was once given press credentials at KSC - and romance novel cover model and margarine spokesman Fabio was wandering around the VIP site for the STS-93 launch. Certainly there is clear evidence of long-standing flexibility in the judgement calls made by NASA PAO in deciding who gets press accreditation (and access to VIPs) at NASA - and who does not.

Curiously, a few weeks after Mr. Welch denied my request, the Mars Pathfinder website experienced a hit rate unprecedented in the Web's short history - one that eventually came to number in the hundreds of millions. So much for the perception among some at NASA that the Internet, and the content thereon, was not something to be taken seriously.

I have since learned from a number of reporters who were at JPL and elsewhere during the Mars Pathfinder landing that Mr. Welch and other PAO staff approached reporters and asked them if they thought that I - and NASA Watch - were "press". The reporters I spoke with (half a dozen or so) all told NASA that they thought I was indeed "press".

Flash forward to 1999 and the debut of space.com - a creature wholly of the Internet. As this site premiered, it included an interview between its CEO Lou Dobbs and Dan Goldin. Was Mr. Dobbs granted press credentials to interview Mr. Goldin? If not, how did he get into the building or make his arrangements? Indeed, are the other reporters now busy working for

space.com in possession of valid NASA press credentials? It would seem so since one of them was at the KSC press site for the STS-93 launch the other day.

Subsequent to the debut of space.com, it was announced that former Associate Administrator for Policy and Plans and Special Assistant to the Administrator Alan Ladwig was joining space.com as an assistant to Mr. Dobbs. A few weeks prior to this announcement, space.com announced that the Chair of its Board of Directors would be former Astronaut and former Associate Administrator for Exploration Sally Ride (also a member of the President's Committee of Advisors on Science and Technology - PCAST).

Certainly, It would seem that NASA PAO has decided that an Internet-only publication can be considered worthy of the designation "press". Why else would people of such caliber as Mr. Dobbs, Mr. Ladwig, and Dr. Ride lend their names to it? Indeed, why else would Mr. Dobbs resign a nice job at CNNfn and put his own money at stake in this new space news venture?

Back to Mr. Welch's conditions for my designation as press. Since our conversation, I have served as guest editor (author and illustrator) of the January/February 1999 issue of Ad Astra, the magazine of the National Space Society. I have also written for the Internet publications BioMedNet, NSS Space Views, and The Mars Society's "New Mars".

Then there is the issue raised by Mr. Welch regarding my efforts as being no more than "vanity press" - and, by implication, lacking in credibility. As the direct result of writing and editing NASA Watch, I was invited to testify before the House Science Committee's Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics in October 1998 at hearings on "NASA at 40". I withdrew my name at the last minute when I learned that Mr. Goldin had refused to testify with me. None the less, during the hearings, Chairman Rohrabacher asked that my requested written testimony be entered into the formal record - testimony excerpted later on 23 October 1998 on the editorial page of the Washington Post.

As editor of NASA Watch, I have been interviewed by the "Newshour with Jim Lehrer" (PBS), "CBS This Morning", the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, The New York Times, Discovery Channel Canada, "Newsnight" - BBC Television, AP Radio, and the BBC World Service. I, and NASA Watch, have been cited as a news source several times in Congressional hearings by the Chairman of the House Science Committee. NASA Watch has also been cited by The Sunday Times (London), The New York Times, The Boston Globe, The Houston Chronicle, The Detroit Free Press, Knight-Ridder Newspapers, Nature, Government Executive Magazine, Gannett News Service, MSNBC, Aerospace Daily, IEEE Spectrum Magazine, San Jose Mercury News, the Philadelphia Inquirer, The San Diego Union Tribune, St. Paul/Minneapolis Pioneer Planet, Spokesman Review, ABC, USA Today, Florida Today, Space News, New Scientist, The Age (Australia), and space.com.

NASA Watch is read regularly (during regular working hours) from all NASA centers, the White House (they even asked me to post an OMB job opening on NASA Watch), other agencies, Congress, the aerospace industry, reporters for the "legitimate" press. It is also read by people from countries and locations around the world - including Antarctica.

Readership is growing, not fading. I can only surmise that this is because NASA Watch offers something called "news" - even if it is often presented alongside clearly denoted editorial opinion.

NASA Watch is only the beginning of what will follow. Others will soon be online (and not in print) who are much more adept at this art than I. They too will be asking for accreditation.

So, have I met Mr. Welch's criteria for press accreditation? Do I meet yours?

If not, why not?

Keith Cowing

Editor
NASA Watch

Appendix C

NASA's August 1999 Rejection of NASA Watch's Application for Press Credentials

Mr. Keith Cowing
Editor, NASA Watch
P.O. Box 3569
Reston, VA 20195-1569

Dear Keith,

I have received your open letter requesting NASA press accreditation. I hope you will allow me the opportunity through this letter to explain to you and some of your readers our policy on press accreditation. I am attaching a copy of that policy for your reference.

Our policy on press accreditation is consistent with policies developed by the US House of Representatives and Senate Press Galleries, the Department of Defense, the White House and other agencies that generate similar media interest. For example, the Senate Press Gallery requires that applicants' "chief attention must be given to - or one-half of their earned income must be derived from - the gathering or reporting of news..."

In order to be accredited by NASA, you must work for a recognized news gathering organization with a formal, organized structure behind it. That rule holds for newspaper, radio, television and Internet reporters. Freelance journalists are accredited only if they are on assignment from a magazine, newspaper, television station, Internet news site, or other recognized news gathering organization.

You mentioned that you occasionally write for Ad Astra. If the magazine deems it necessary for you to visit the KSC press site to write your article, we would be happy to grant you accreditation for that purpose. Likewise, if you are writing an article for space.com or ABCNews.com, and they feel it is necessary for you to attend a launch or visit a NASA center to write the article, we will be happy to accommodate.

Unfortunately, just having a site on the Internet does not automatically qualify you as a news gathering organization, just as printing a story on a flyer or a pamphlet does not qualify you as a news gathering organization. While I respect your interest in the space program, the number of individuals who have their own web sites with an emphasis on space and aeronautics is growing. If we were to grant you a press badge, we would have no basis to decline a potentially unlimited population of people who have no news gathering affiliation. Therefore, we must respectfully decline your request.

We believe the Internet is an extremely powerful tool for making public information available to the taxpayer and have devoted considerable resources and expertise to that end. We are delighted to provide accreditation to web-based news organizations. We have accredited Wired, MSNBC.com, space.com, ABCNews.com, Florida Today's online service, and other Web-based news organizations.

Keith, we try to be fair and even-handed in our media operations, and strive to implement policies that are logical, and at the same time allow us some flexibility. I can honestly say we have given this a lot of thought and done a great deal of research. This policy is not only consistent with other Federal agencies that generate a lot of media interest; it actually makes sense.

As to your complaint about Fabio being at one of the viewing sites at the STS-93 launch, it is important to remember that he was invited as a guest of an astronaut and was NOT credentialed for the press site. Don't forget, you were invited by NASA to the exact same VIP viewing site for the most watched launch in the past decade, STS-95!

Keep the faith.

Sincerely,

Peggy Wilhide
Associate Administrator for Public Affairs

Appendix D

August 1999 Policy on Press Accreditation

NASA Office of Public Affairs Policy for Accrediting Media Representatives

I. General Policy

As a publicly funded agency charged with disseminating information about its programs as widely as practicable, NASA is committed to making access to its facilities and personnel as free and open as possible. To that end, it is the policy of NASA's Office of Public Affairs and the public affairs directorates at NASA field centers to provide press accreditation to all bona fide media representatives, along with necessary access to NASA facilities and officials.

II. Requirements for Accreditation

To obtain press accreditation, a media representative must be:

- a) employed by a legitimate news-gathering organization, including, but not limited to, newspapers, magazines, trade newsletters, television or radio stations, independent production companies or Internet news sites;
- or
- b) a free-lance writer or producer on assignment from a legitimate news-gathering organization.

Requests for accreditation must be submitted in writing (whether delivered in person or transmitted by fax) on the letterhead of the requesting media organization. These requests should be sent to the News Chief of the NASA facility where accreditation is being sought. For coverage of Space Shuttle missions requiring access to more than facility, NASA will issue one credential permitting access to multiple facilities.

At its discretion, NASA also issues long-term media credentials (typically valid for one year) to media whose assignments require frequent access to a NASA facility.

III. "Legitimate News-Gathering Organizations"

A legitimate news-gathering organization is defined as an organization that meets these four criteria:

- a) it publishes or broadcasts on a regular basis,
- b) represents a collective, organizational editorial voice, not simply the offerings of a single individual,
- c) engages in first-hand reporting on NASA-related news events, AND
- d) its employee(s) or representative(s) requesting accreditation devote their chief attention to -- or derive more than one half their earned income from -- the gathering and reporting of news.

IV. Privileges of Accreditation

Once accredited, a media representative will be afforded all privileges offered to all other accredited representatives, including entry to NASA briefings, opportunities to interview NASA officials and access to NASA facilities open to the press.

V. Terms of Accreditation

Access to working space: NASA centers will try to provide access to working space for all accredited media. However, working space and other resources are limited. During high-visibility events, NASA centers may not be able to accommodate all requests for working space and will allocate those resources at their discretion.

Access to facilities: For safety and programmatic reasons, NASA centers may limit reporters' access to specific sites. The Office of Public Affairs will work with media representatives to gain appropriate access to those facilities when news events warrant.

In general, NASA strives to provide ready access to people and facilities on a non-interference basis. Safety and the successful completion of its missions are NASA's first priorities. At the same time, fair and open access to NASA personnel and activities is an extremely high priority.

Where conflicts arise between these goals, the Office of Public Affairs will strive to reach accommodation as quickly and fairly as possible. For example, in high interest events or contingencies, NASA may choose, at its discretion, to form a media pool to allow access for the press while creating minimum interference with programmatic needs.

Access to NASA personnel: The Office of Public Affairs will make every reasonable effort to obtain interview opportunities for reporters with any NASA official. However, the availability of specific personnel will always be subject to the needs of NASA's programs. In cases where a specifically requested individual is unavailable, the Office of Public Affairs will endeavor to find a suitable substitute.

Occasionally events occur that are of wide media interest, for which there are a very small number of qualified NASA spokespersons. In that event, the Office of Public Affairs will endeavor to create opportunities, such as press conferences, that will give the largest number of media a chance for interviews. In these cases, requests for individual interviews may not be able to be accommodated.

Distribution of materials: Because NASA is committed to spending taxpayers' money as efficiently as possible, Public Affairs materials will be distributed in formats that make the best use of those funds. For example, during an event of wide media interest, printed materials and photographs may be distributed in electronic formats only, as the cost of producing paper copies and color photographic prints would be prohibitive.

VI. Suspension or Revocation of Accreditation

While working at NASA facilities, accredited media representatives will respect and abide by NASA policies, including the Terms of Accreditation in Section V above. Failure to do so may result in temporary suspension or permanent revocation of NASA press accreditation.

VII. Emergency Situations

The Office of Public Affairs recognizes that emergency situations are often inherently newsworthy and will try to work with media representatives so they can cover these stories when they happen. However, when these situations arise, the safety of NASA personnel, media representatives and civilians will be the highest priority, and media representatives will follow instructions from Public Affairs personnel and NASA security officials. Failure to do so may result in temporary suspension or permanent revocation of NASA press credentials.

Appendix E

Charge to NASA Team Reviewing Accreditation Policy

National Aeronautics and
Space Administration
Headquarters
Washington, DC 20546-0001



Reply to Attn of P

NOV 30 1999

TO: Kennedy Space Center
Attn: AB-FI/Mr. Bruce Buckingham

FROM: P/Associate Administrator for Public Affairs

SUBJECT: Media Credentialling

Thank you for agreeing to chair a committee to evaluate NASA's current credentialling process and make recommendations for changes if necessary.

As you know, the advent of the Internet has created a new breed of reporters, on-line journalists. In the past, because of space limitations for high profile missions at Kennedy Space Center and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, we have required reporters to be affiliated with recognized news-gathering organizations such as newspapers, television stations, radio stations, magazines, or their internet sites. We need to make sure our credentialling policies treat internet reporters the same as journalists from other mediums.

I would like for your committee to include, but not be limited to, representatives from Kennedy Space Center media affairs, Johnson Space Center media affairs, Jet Propulsion Laboratory media affairs, and the space press corps. Although your review can be as wide in scope as you deem necessary, please consider the following:

- Establishing an Agencywide credentialling policy that will hold up even during periods of intense media interest, such as STS-95 or the Mars Pathfinder Landing.
- Benchmarking against other federal agencies, state and local government agencies, and private sector businesses that generate media interest similar to NASA.
- Including representatives from the space press corps in NASA's credentialling process.
- Taking steps that keep the press sites at NASA Centers limited to working, professional journalists who are dedicated to covering NASA missions for television, newspaper, magazine, radio, or internet news sites.


Peggy Wilhide

Cc:
KSC/AB/Mr. Joe Gordon

Appendix F

Partial List of Rejected Applications for NASA Press Credentials

Partial List of Rejected Applications for NASA Press Credentials

The following are examples of rejected applications for press credentials since *NASA Watch's* first application for credentials in 1997. This list was assembled by NASA Headquarters PAO based on inputs provided by the news chiefs at Kennedy Space Center, Johnson Space Center, and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. In some cases, the reason for the rejection was provided. According to NASA PAO, this is not a comprehensive list, but rather a cursory summary. The list does not include applications rejected after December 6, 1999.

1997: Mars Pathfinder (JPL)

- NASA Watch
- A Space News reporter attempted to gain credentials for a “stringer,” who turned out to be her sister.

1998: STS-95, John Glenn’s return to space (KSC)

- General Surgery News
- The Media Power Group - Universal Studios
- American Image Press
- CompuTowne
- The Brevard Insider
- The Paper - People and Places in Print - A Weekly Magazine
- Today's Photographer International
- Soluri and Nolletti Productions

1998 and 1999: Various space shuttle missions (KSC)

- Representative of Aerial Photography - denied accreditation for STS-103 because he requested placing his cameras closer to the pad than is allowed for safety reasons.
- Freelance journalist (for a German magazine) – denied because he could not provide proper documentation proving he had an assignment.
- Representatives of Calada News Gathering Service - denied due to not being able to verify a listing in media directories.
- Alien-Babes.com - denied due to improper content on web pages