

March 24, 2006

Senator Patrick Leahy  
Senator Jim Jeffords  
Representative Bernie Sanders  
Governor Jim Douglas

Dear Sen. Leahy, Sen. Jeffords, Rep. Sanders and Gov. Douglas:

Thank you for your letter, your sincere concern about Chris Graff, your deep understanding of the role of The Associated Press and your steadfast support for the free flow of information.

You all are involved in the making of laws and fully cognizant of the court precedents that routinely follow. You know we cannot and will not engage in a discussion of confidential personnel decisions. It is inappropriate to expect AP to open up personnel records of one of its employees to public scrutiny unless it is forced to do so under court order. In this situation, AP is not being secretive but respectful of an employee with 27 years of service and is adhering to the widely accepted personnel practices and labor laws that I'm certain you adhere to in your own workplaces.

We understand that in the absence of any detail people will continue to speculate about what happened. However, we must note that speculation can be erroneous and damaging both for Chris and The Associated Press.

You further suggested that AP might be bowing to political pressure. That's just nuts. The issue is purely one of internal policy.

It is a matter of fact that AP has been a vocal leader in fighting for the public's right to know for decades. Most recently, and of interest to the world, AP sued and successfully forced the government to release the identities of people being held in secret by the US government at Guantanamo.

In addition, AP journalists in all 50 states recently participated in a ground-breaking study of how state and local laws have changed since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

It was The Associated Press that broke the story of the Bush Administration's secret deal with the United Arab Emirates company to run our nation's ports.

It was The Associated Press that first acquired and then ran the video of the FEMA briefings that exposed the level of detail about the New Orleans levee problems the Bush Administration had in its possession, contrary to the administration's public statements.

AP revealed that many 9/11 loans intended for businesses affected negatively by the disaster instead went to companies far out of state that suffered no effects.

Our efforts continue at the state level as well. In just the past 12 months AP has fought to pry open the public records, public meetings and court proceedings in more than 20 states.

We can state emphatically that we remain devoted to this core value of The Associated Press: to bring to light information that the public has a right to know. However, individual personnel records – whether at private companies or at local, state or federal government entities – are rarely part of the public record, and that is what is at issue in the Graff case.

Most important, let me assure you that The Associated Press remains fully committed to providing Vermont the coverage it needs and deserves. We believe our coverage will be maintained if not improved in the months ahead.

Again, I appreciate your concern and understanding.

Sincerely,

Thomas Curley