

# Washington Post's Policy: Fullest Possible Attribution

Benjamin C. Bradlee, executive editor of The Washington Post, issued the following statement yesterday on background briefings:

Over the last five years, the reporters and editors of this newspaper have become increasingly concerned about the use and abuse of unattributed information by the government at background briefings.

In theory, unattributed information given to the press by the government at background briefings enables the press to do a better job of reporting.

In practice, this is less and less true. Background briefings have become vehicles for the government to give its versions of the news, to use the press as a vehicle for its policy announcements and its political advantage without taking responsibility for what it is saying.

This practice has been true of every administration. This newspaper has long been a party to this practice. The public has suffered from this collusion between the government and the press.

We now are convinced that we have engaged in this deception and done this dis-

service to the reader long enough.

Therefore, it is now the policy of The Washington Post, in its coverage on government news briefings, to insist on public accountability for the public business.

We instructed our reporters to insist through every means available to them that material offered at these briefings should be on the record and fully attributable.

If ground rules are imposed providing for anything less than full attribution on the record, Washington Post reporters will immediately ask that attribution be made direct and on the record.

If that request is refused, the reporter will seek attribution specific enough so that no readers can reasonably be confused.

If this request is refused, the Washington Post has instructed its reporters to inform the agency or official that the newspaper's handling of the material will be determined by the editors' judgment of their responsibility to inform the public. We believe that responsibility cannot be transferred by us to any public official or circumscribed by government edict. The

Washington Post believes that while certain circumstances may make full, on-the-record attribution impractical, the public interest is not served by permitting statements of policy to be made by government officials who are unwilling to be held accountable for their own words.

The decision whether to remain voluntarily in the briefing is one for the reporter's discretion. Under normal conditions he would remain and report under these guidelines.

Nothing in this policy concerns contacts with government officials and other news sources initiated by reporters of The Washington Post. In these instances, the contacts will continue on an independent, individual basis, under terms understood and accepted by the reporter and the news source.