

# Is this any way for media to treat a president?

**By DONALD M. ROTHBERG**  
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The president wants to look presidential. He has a foreign leader at his side and hopes the assembled reporters will focus on world affairs. Then someone asks about his sex life.

Is this any way to treat the leader of the world's most powerful nation?

Like many Americans, Cornel Sarosdy thinks it is an outrageous way for the White House press corps to treat a president, even one he does not particularly like.

After seeing President Clinton asked a Whitewater question in Mexico and a Paula Jones question in Spain, Sarosdy wrote to the president and denounced "the noxious behavior" of the media.

The semiretired engineer from San Antonio told Clinton that "such questions are completely out of place in the circumstance of a meeting between you and heads of other states."

Sarosdy had gotten a look at the primal tension between presidents and the press and like many other Americans he was offended by what he saw. At the heart of the insoluble conflict are the conflicting demands of reporters who embrace the chance to question the president and a White House staff determined to manage the flow of news.

"The president is surrounded by armed guards and paid consultants 24 hours a day and the reporters' access to him is extremely limited," said Andrew Rosenthal, Washington editor of The New York Times and a former White House correspondent for the newspaper.

"We've made Clinton available," countered press secretary Mike McCurry. "He's been enormously accessible."

Indeed, the conflict often looks worse from a distance than it does up close.

"The manners and the substance of the questions don't seem nearly as difficult to the president who's answering them as it looks on television," said Marlin Fitzwater, who served as press secretary to Presidents Reagan and Bush.

Fitzwater said the president is likely to warn his visiting foreign counterpart what to expect when they appear before the media.

"What happens is, the president will say to the president of Mexico, 'We're going out here to talk about our meeting but don't be surprised if the first three questions are about Whitewater.' And then they'll joke about it and go out there and put on the performance," he said.

But there was no way Bush could have warned Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of what was going to happen when they walked out to meet reporters on Aug. 11, 1992.

The first 10 questions were predictably about the Middle East.

But the 11th referred to a published report that "a former U.S. ambassador, a man now deceased, had told several persons that he arranged for a sexual tryst involving you and one of your female staffers in Geneva in 1984."

"I'm not going to take any sleazy questions like that," said an outraged Bush. "I'm not going to respond other than to say it's a lie."

"Once in a blue moon a question will cross the lines of civility and you want to hide under a table," says Jonathan Wolman, Washington bureau chief for The Associated Press. "But most of these sessions are simple and straightforward — the president is available for questions and they run the gamut from cream puffs to hardball."

Rosenthal of The New York Times said he does not believe the fact that a president is meeting with a foreign leader should inhibit reporters from asking tough ques-

tions about domestic issues.

"If you're a White House reporter and you have a chance to ask a president a question, you should ask it," he said. But he also cited the question to Bush as an example of a reporter going too far.

"That question would have been out of line at a domestic news conference," Rosenthal said. "Standing up in the middle of a news conference and asking a president about his sex life is out of line, period."

Pollster Andrew Kohut of the Pew Center for the People & the Press said there is a "public feeling the president should not be embarrassed when he's on foreign soil."

He said that attitude exists even among people who are politically opposed to the president.

"I'm not a Clinton supporter; I'd like to see him run out of office," Sarosdy said in a telephone interview. But he does not accept the argument that reporters must grab any opportunity to ask a question because they get so few chances.

"Good manners are not to be given up simply for the excuse of getting something done," he said.

## WASHINGTON TODAY An AP News Analysis

EDITOR'S NOTE — Donald M. Rothberg has covered national affairs for The Associated Press in Washington since 1966.

# Smithville park volunteer steered campers to sites based on race

SMITHVILLE, Mo. (AP) — City officials have apologized after a volunteer park attendant allegedly tried to discourage at least one camper from using a campground, saying the spot was popular with blacks.

"We do not condone, support or tolerate discrimination of any sort," said Smithville Mayor Ron Van Winkle. "We have undertaken procedures to see that it doesn't happen again."

On Aug. 7, the attendant allegedly tried at least once to direct visitors at Smith's Fork Park to sites based on race.

City officials learned of the incident after a Nebraska man who camped at the park sent letters to city hall and a Smithville newspaper after returning home.

In his letter, Brian Pillard wrote that when he requested a certain motor-home lot, he was steered away and told it was a popular spot for black campers. Pillard and his family went to the spot anyway.

"I was unprepared for a racist attitude like this," Pillard's letter said. "Our visit to Smithville was tarnished by our encounter with racism."

Van Winkle and campground caretakers Charley and Jan Staatz issued public apologies this past week. The Staatzes were out of town when the incident occurred, and had recruited other campers to volunteer as attendants from Aug. 7-10, officials said.

# Mother still searching for son, 15 years after he disappeared

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — It's been 15 years since Johnny Gosch left his Des Moines home early one morning to deliver newspapers. He never returned.

Since that Labor Day weekend in 1982, Noreen Gosch has launched a crusade to find her son and bring to justice those she believes abducted him.

"You know, with cases like mine, usually they go on a few days or even a year, and then there's a resolution," said Ms. Gosch, who was in Kansas City on Friday to help produce a 30-second television spot by the Kansas City-based Lost Child Network.

"But with Johnny, there was no body found, no culprit caught. Nothing," she said. "What kind of a mother would I be if I'd stopped searching?"

Johnny was 12 when he disappeared that Sept. 5 from the corner where he usually picked up copies of The Des Moines Register to deliver to homes in his upper-middle class neighborhood.

Witnesses said Johnny had been talking to someone in a car, perhaps a man.

"Somehow, someone conned or carried him into that car," said Lt. Bernie Taylor of the West Des Moines Police Department. "We believe it was a pedophile. Since

then, we've put together thousands of pages, tens of thousands of pages, worth of interviews in Johnny's case.

"But all we know for sure is ... the stuff we gathered that morning," he said. "It's like he was plucked off the face of the Earth."

Ms. Gosch believes she has evidence showing her son was stalked, photographed, captured and sold by an organized ring of pedophiles — adults who are sexually attracted to children.

She believes she has names of some of the people involved, including some with influence. To get her information, she met with criminals, prisoners, anyone with information — people who wouldn't contact police, or whom police wouldn't trust. She has given the information to investigators.

In the years since her son disappeared, Ms. Gosch believes — and authorities occasionally have agreed with her — that Johnny has been seen or heard from many times.

She says he begged for help in Chicago, before two men dragged him away. He scribbled, "I am alive, Johnny Gosch" on a dollar bill found in Iowa. She talks about sightings in Oklahoma, Arizona and Colorado.

Debbie Weierman, an FBI spokeswoman in Washington, said

pedophile rings exist in the United States.

"But a ring can mean a small group of people, and organized should be spelled with a small letter 'o.' We don't want to cause panic, here," she said. "These are small, loosely organized groups who generally stay in contact over the Internet."

Jeff Lanza, FBI spokesman in Kansas City, noted that in recent Senate testimony, agents discussed breaking up "The Orchid Club."

"It was an organized group of pedophiles who preyed on children," he said. "The result was 16 people were indicted in federal courts."

The FBI would not say whether Johnny's disappearance could be tied to such rings.

Lt. Taylor said they had checked out the possibility, and found nothing.

In March, a private investigator told Ms. Gosch that Johnny still was alive.

"They said he'd escaped from the ring, probably a couple years ago, and that he was safe now," she said. "They also said he was afraid to come forward. He's afraid the people he escaped from will kill him, or that the police won't believe him, or that he'll be in trouble because of bad things he's done."

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