

A NEW MISSION FOR THE WH PRESS CORPS



Update: Politico reports that Obama has released the records, considering releasing all their visitor logs.

Remember when NPR posted a picture of all the lobbyists attending a health care committee meeting and asked its readers to crowd source those lobbyists identities?

Well, given the news that the Obama White House is treating the health industry executives who have visited with the same secrecy that Dick Cheney accorded his oil buddies, perhaps it's time the White House press corps did something similar?

Invoking an argument used by President George W. Bush, the Obama administration has turned down a request from a watchdog group for a list of health industry executives who have visited the White House to discuss the massive healthcare overhaul.

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington sent a letter to the Secret Service asking about visits from 18 executives representing health insurers, drug makers, doctors and other players in the debate. The group wants the material in order to gauge the influence of those executives in crafting a new healthcare policy.

The Secret Service sent a reply stating that documents revealing the frequency of such visits were considered presidential records exempt from public disclosure laws. The agency also said it was advised by the Justice Department that the Secret Service was within its rights to withhold the information

because of the "presidential
communications privilege."

Think about it. The White House press corps has ready access to the outsides of the White House. A significant number of them hang around in their virtual office for hours on end. Wouldn't they be much more productive if they started—collectively—documenting who was coming and going at the White House? Wouldn't creating a record of who had the access at the White House be a better use of their time than serving as props in the next stage managed press conference?

I know this is a tall order, given that most of the outlets covering the White House full time would rather charge those White House visitors than expose them. But it might make these journalists' efforts worthwhile.