




**Memorandum**

January 16, 2007

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**TO:** All CRS Staff

**FROM:** Daniel P. Mulhollan   
Director

**SUBJECT:** Interacting with the Media

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I am updating the CRS policy on interacting with the media that has been in place since 1997. Concerns expressed in the past year make this an opportune time to review policies that seek to ensure that CRS' mission and the responsibilities of individual employees to serve Congress in a confidential and impartial manner, remain protected.

The policy statement retains the basic requirement that has been a part of the policy since its inception: Staff must adhere to the basic tenets of CRS, respecting the confidential nature of our work for Congress and the requirements of objectivity, non-partisanship and non-advocacy, whenever they speak to the media on matters relating to their work. These standards, which apply to all of our written and consultative work, must guide all media interactions.

The policy also continues to require that all on-the-record media interactions be reported to division/office management. It describes a role for the Office of Communications in assisting staff in determining whether speaking with the media is advisable, and in following up on questions about the accuracy of reporting. The Office will also be the lead in discussions with the media about agency policies and operations.

The risks to individual staff members and to CRS as a whole are greater with today's media because of the instant dissemination of news, the competition among media outlets, and the lack of control over quotation, context, and subsequent appearance elsewhere. We have all seen the way in which portions of products can be misquoted and taken out of context, potentially damaging the image of our colleagues and the Service in the eyes of some of our clients. These risks are even greater in the case of media interviews and statements elicited from CRS staff.

We can do little about how our products are characterized in the media other than request correction when appropriate. However, staff members who choose to speak to the media must realize that they are operating in an environment in which it is possible that they will be misquoted or that a quoted statement will appear to betray a policy preference, come

across as unbalanced, or appear out of context elsewhere in the press or on the Internet. We have seen examples of analysts' statements that have been picked up by blogs and websites and placed in a light that harms CRS' image as an impartial and objective support arm for Congress.

Even though most staff rarely if ever speak to the media (many viewing such activity as incompatible with their duties and recognizing the risks pointed out above), some argue that there can be value in, for instance, speaking off-the-record to reporters in certain circumstances, because information may be gleaned that may be useful to their work for Congress. Others maintain relationships with specialized or trade media that in their view prove useful to their work. Many published quotes of CRS staff appear to be the result of confining remarks to factual matters and adhering to the requirement to be objective and impartial. Nevertheless, staff must consider carefully whether the perceived benefits of speaking to the media outweigh the very real risks to their and the Service's reputation.

The staff member who chooses to interact with the media — knowing the risks involved — must make every effort to reduce the possibility of non-adherence to CRS standards of balance and impartiality, misuse of quotations, or out-of-context appearance of their statements. While off-the-record statements are preferable to those attributed to a CRS staff member, it should be remembered that a reporter's promise of off-the-record treatment may not be honored — another risk a staff member takes in such interactions.

CRS intends to be more vigilant in reviewing staff statements made in responding to reporter's questions or in interviews and to monitor more carefully instances of CRS quotes and how they are circulated and used elsewhere. To assist CRS in refuting misstatements or misquotations, staff must keep detailed notes of media interactions and report promptly to their supervisor.

→ Violations of the media policy will be addressed promptly. We may at some point need to adopt a policy that is more restrictive or that prohibits speaking on-the-record to the media without authorization. One option — adopted by our sister agencies, the Government Accountability Office and the Congressional Budget Office — would be to prohibit CRS staff from making on-the-record statements to any media on matters relating to their work unless authorized by the Service. The Library is currently reexamining the regulations that generally govern outside speaking and writing, which may also impact our policy.

The protection of CRS' reputation as a provider of confidential, objective, and impartial support for Congress is critical. Without it, CRS ceases to be of value to Congress.

Attachment



## **CRS Policy Statement: Interacting with the Media**

**Effective Date:** This policy replaces “CRS Guidelines for Working with the Press,” from May 21, 2002. It is effective as of January 16, 2007.

**Background:** CRS works for the Congress, providing impartial and objective research and analysis in aid of the legislative process. Media interactions that do not advance an employee’s work for Congress have the potential to interfere with that mission. The wide and almost instant dissemination of news, the competition among media outlets for stories, and the lack of control over quotation and its context pose risks to CRS employees and to the agency.

Statements by CRS staff appearing in the media could, due to their content, tone, appearance with other quotations, or subsequent republication in other venues, undermine the appearance of CRS staff as objective providers of research and analysis to Congress. Staff members who speak to the media must realize that they are operating in an environment in which it is possible that they will be misquoted or that the quoted statement will appear to betray a policy preference, come across as unbalanced, or appear out of context elsewhere in the press or on the Internet. Furthermore, while off-the-record exchanges may appear to be a less risky option, a reporter’s promise of such treatment may not be honored. It is incumbent on staff to make every effort to minimize the risk of misuse or mischaracterization of remarks made to the media.

**Implementation: Requests by the Media for Information on Policy Issues**

Whenever interacting with the media on matters relating to their work, CRS staff members must observe the following requirements:

- CRS staff must adhere to the basic tenets of CRS applied in all of our work for Congress. Confidentiality must be maintained. The standards for CRS writing — objectivity, nonpartisanship and non-advocacy of policies or arguments — must guide all media interactions.
- CRS staff remain subject to Library of Congress regulations that prohibit activities that may undermine one's ability to be seen as an impartial provider of information and analysis to Congress (LCR 2023-1, 2023-3). Staff should also be mindful of other relevant Library regulations, such as restrictions on allowing the media on Library premises, (LCR 1210-1), and proper use of official time and resources (LCR 2017-5 and 2023-2).
- CRS staff must report within 24 hours all on-the-record interactions with any media to their supervisor, including the name of the reporter, media affiliation, date, time, and detailed notes on the matters discussed or to be discussed. This includes instances where staff learns of media presence at outside speaking engagements. Division/office management should forward this information to the CRS Office of Communications as soon as possible. The Office will monitor how the media reports the interaction, follow up on any further dissemination of the quotation in other media outlets, and manage all requests for corrections. The Office will also assist staff in determining if speaking with the media is advisable.

**Speaking on Behalf of CRS**

Only staff authorized by the Director may speak for CRS. Questions from the media about CRS and its policies, research, budget and organization are to be referred to the Office of Communications. In such situations, the Office, in consultation with the Director, will determine who will respond for CRS.

**Contacts:**

Questions regarding application of this policy should be addressed to division or office management. Division and office heads should direct their questions to the Office of Congressional Affairs and Counselor to the Director.

Matters relating to whether to speak with the media and follow up regarding the accuracy of reporting should be directed to the CRS Office of Communications.