



Society of Environmental Journalists

P.O. Box 2492
Jenkintown PA 19046 USA
Phone: (215) 884-8174 • Fax: (215) 884-8175
sej@sej.org • www.sej.org

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November 15, 2012

Secretary Ken Salazar
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street Northwest
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar,

As president of the Society of Environmental Journalists, an international organization with 1,300 members dedicated to the goals of improving the quality, accuracy and visibility of environmental journalism, I am writing to you today about the Election Day incident of intimidation in Colorado involving you and one of the organization's members, Dave Philipps.

Mr. Philipps, doing his job as a journalist, asked you about the BLM wild horses issue, and, while you answered his questions, you also threatened him with physical violence. Such a threat was intemperate and uncalled for, and went well beyond the bounds of civil discourse. It disrespected the role of journalism and journalists in a democratic society, as well as their public audience. It was, in short, unacceptable behavior.

I understand that you have apologized and have agreed to sit down with Mr. Philipps for an interview. SEJ respects and commends you for that response. However, I must take this opportunity to point out that one way to avoid such "off event" questioning in the future would be for you and the rest of the Obama administration to provide better responses to reporters' questions and more access to departmental officials. Access has been a difficult and ongoing issue in recent years for environmental journalists in dealings with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of the Interior. I know you know SEJ from your attendance at our 2011 conference in Miami, and hope that we can move beyond this incident to build a better, more accessible relationship with you, and other officials at Interior and at the EPA.

I would welcome an opportunity to work with you and others in the administration to improve journalists' access in President Obama's second term.

Sincerely,

Don Hopey
President, Society of Environmental Journalists
Environment Reporter, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

*Strengthening the quality, reach and viability of journalism across all media
to advance public understanding of environmental issues*