

Credentialed columnist denied access to Cheney speech

- ***Syndicated columnist and journalism professor Walter Brasch was denied access to Vice President Dick Cheney's campaign stop at Bloomsburg University, despite having received a press credential to cover the speech.***

Aug. 27, 2004 -- An award-winning syndicated columnist was denied access by unidentified security officials to Vice President Dick Cheney's speech Wednesday at Bloomsburg University, a public college in northeastern Pennsylvania, despite having received a media credential from the Bush/Cheney '04 campaign.

Upon arriving to pick up his credential at the university's gymnasium, where Cheney spoke, columnist Walter Brasch was told he could no longer attend the event. A journalism professor at Bloomsburg for the past 25 years, Brasch said he was approached by a group of men who refused to identify themselves, including who they worked for and why Brasch was suddenly no longer allowed to attend the event.

"I repeatedly said I was there as a reporter, not a protestor or anything else," Brasch, 59, said. "I had my notepad, and they could see that I was taking notes on what they were saying.

"Every time I asked who they were, they said, 'We don't have to tell you that.' " he added.

Brasch said he was eventually approached by the director of the university's police department, Bob Klinger, who ordered him to leave the premises. Liza Benedict, a spokesperson for the university, said all campus security personnel operated under the authority of the U.S. Secret Service Wednesday.

Ann Womack, a spokesperson for the Cheney campaign, said Brasch was told to leave because he could not provide a valid press credential to verify his media affiliation, and because he violated a "security zone." Womack said Brasch parked his car in a restricted area and refused to move it.

Brasch, who writes for Spectrum Features Syndicate, said he was never asked to provide any verification of his identity. He said he introduced himself to the woman managing the press check-in table, she marked his name off on a list of those credentialed to attend the event, and wrote his name on a press pass. It was not until he already received the pass that he was told to leave, without explanation.

Womack said those people were part of the advance staff. Because they don't speak on behalf of the campaign, they chose not to reveal their identity, she said.

As for allegedly violating the "security zone," Brasch said he simply parked where other media vehicles, such as satellite trucks, were located. No one objected to his choice of parking spots until after he was denied access to the event, he said.

A self-proclaimed "fairly liberal journalist," Brasch typically writes about civil liberties and the First Amendment. He is a staunch critic of President Bush, and his work regularly appears on such Web sites as Counterpunch.org and BushWatch.com. Brasch has written 13 books, including *The Joy of Sax: America During the Bill Clinton Era*, and has received various regional and national awards for his columns. He often co-writes with his wife, Rosemary, who says she is a registered Republican.

Cheney traveled through Pennsylvania yesterday, stumping in Wilkes-Barre, Pottsville and Bloomsburg. Bush/Cheney campaign events have typically been closed to the general public, with tickets going to supporters of the president and those who volunteer.

Brasch said his interest in the vice president's speech at Bloomsburg was simply to see "what was going on and why."

"I wanted to see how the mainstream press would cover it," he said.

-- [JL](#)