

Don't tarnish Princess Diana's legacy by censoring the press, Libertarians urge

The First Amendment allows no "paparazzi exception"

WASHINGTON, DC — Don't let the tragic death of Princess Diana be used as an excuse to restrict the First Amendment, the Libertarian Party urged today.

"Princess Diana is dead — don't let free speech be the next victim," said Steve Dasbach, the party's national chairman. "This tragedy should not be used as an opportunity to pass new laws to restrict the legal rights of news photographers."

Dasbach's statement came as the world mourned the unexpected death of Diana Spencer, former princess of Wales, who was the victim of a fatal car accident on Sunday. French police say paparazzi on motorcycles may have contributed to the crash.

"Diana's death is a tragedy — and we offer sympathy to her family, friends, and to all who were enchanted by her dignity, beauty, and commitment to charitable causes," said Dasbach. "But the legacy of her death should not be new laws that infringe on the First Amendment."

Although no new laws have been proposed in the USA yet, Dasbach noted that demands are growing in Europe for new "privacy" laws and other unprecedented press restrictions.

"It's only a matter of time until some American politician — determined to make a name for himself as tough on paparazzi — proposes legislation," predicted Dasbach. "But that would be a tragic mistake. There is no paparazzi exception to the First Amendment."

Besides, he said, *individual* Americans already have the power to control the paparazzi.

"If you are personally offended by the actions of these Kodak commandos, stop buying the tasteless tabloids that publish tasteless photos — and these photographers will stop getting paychecks. The marketplace is more effective than any unconstitutional law," he said.

In addition, Dasbach noted that various laws *already* restrict the excessive behavior of photographers, without infringing on anyone's rights.

"For example, trespass laws can keep photographers off private property. Traffic laws can require them to drive in a safe manner. And assault laws can prevent them from physically harming or antagonizing the celebrities they cover," he said. "Unconstitutional new laws may earn a politician a headline or two, but aren't needed to solve the problem."

The bottom line, he said: "Paparazzi can be annoying and even downright irresponsible — but government censors are truly dangerous."

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