

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING ABOUT THE POLICY: QUOTES FROM
FAMILIES, VETERANS AND EDITORIALS

Veterans and Families

“Let the media and the rest of America see the coffins ... It’s the least we can do. Our children did not live in secrecy; they should not be shrouded in secrecy upon their passing.” Statement of Jane Bright, whose son Evan Ashcraft was killed in Iraq, reported in Amanda Ripley, with reporting by Mark Thompson/Washington, *An Image of Grief Returns*, TIME MAGAZINE, May 3, 2004 at 28.

“It shows this is the price we have to pay for freedom. ... That is what happens, as sad as it is. It’s the ultimate sacrifice. It’s very patriotic.” Statement of Vanessa Anderson, whose husband serves in Kuwait with the Utah National Guard’s 1457th Engineer Battalion, reported in Pamela Manson, *Worth a thousand words, Casualties of War; Soldiers’ relatives, vets say seeing photos of GI’s coffins may be important if families don’t mind; Families don’t mind pictures of GI’s coffins*, THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE, April 24, 2004 at A1.

“It does show the ultimate sacrifice and lets people know that freedom is not free.” Statement of Lowell Tripp, a Vietnam War veteran whose son serves in Iraq, reported in Pamela Manson, *Worth a thousand words, Casualties of War; Soldiers’ relatives, vests say seeing photos of GI’s coffins may be important if families don’t mind; Families don’t mind pictures of GI’s coffins*, THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE, April 24, 2004 at A1.

“We know soldiers are dying. We see it every day on the news. It’s the truth, and I don’t know why they object to showing it.” Statement of Ann Y. Sherman Wolcott, national president of American Gold Star Mothers who lost her son in the Vietnam War, reported in Editorial, *Dishonoring the Dead*, THE BOSTON GLOBE, April 27, 2004.

“[If pictures are used] to show reverence and memorialize their sacrifice to the country, then I am OK with that. ... If it is being used pro or con for the war, then it is absolutely disrespectful because it is trivializing the sacrifice they made.” Michael Hansen, a Florida National Guard Captain who served in Iraq, reported in Frank Davies, *Military families reveal mixed feelings on casket photos*, THE MIAMI HERALD, April 24, 2004.

“[T]here is no apparent consensus among families about whether they want events surrounding the death and burial of their service member made public.” Statement of the National Military Family Association, reported in Frank Davies, *Military families reveal mixed feelings on casket photos*, THE MIAMI HERALD, April 24, 2004.

“When I see a casket draped with a flag that means that person paid the ultimate sacrifice. Those people are heroes.” Statement of Robert Mallory of Buckner, a World War II veteran, reported in Jim Muir, *Flag Draped Coffin Photos Raise Questions Nationwide*, THE SOUTHERN ILLINOISAN, April 23, 2004.

One soldier in Iraq wrote that the least the nation could do for a soldier that made the ultimate sacrifice is to “not hide his body away like something shameful” William M. Arkin, Opinion, *Censorship Dishonors the Dead—and the Truth*, L.A. TIMES, May 2, 2004 at M3.

Editorials

“It seems to me that our nation would benefit from both protecting the privacy of those who grieve and the dignity of those who have died and finding a way to invite everyone to experience common grief. Whether or not we support the way the military action in Iraq has unfolded, all of us need to be reminded by the stark symbols of grief that this is a serious matter in which we are engaged.” Letter of Jin Watkins, a Vietnam War Veteran and escort officer for the body of a soldier who died in Vietnam, *Voice of the People*, THE HERALD (Rock Hill, S.C.) May 2, 2004 at 2E.

“The policy is definitely in conflict with common sense and with a national heritage. The military says it maintains its rule to protect the privacy of families, but the photos show no family names. The caskets are as generic as rows of white headstones seen from a distance in Arlington -- and as poignant, for each represents a life taken too soon. No matter where one stands on the Iraq conflict -- or any of America's wars -- understanding that human cost is a healthy dose of pain.” *Dishonoring the Dead*, THE BOSTON GLOBE, April 27, 2004.

“Images of body bags don’t cause the public to question military campaigns. Rather, questions about the rightness of the missions feed doubts. A clear eyed assessment of the nation’s involvement has a better chance of garnering public support than efforts to squash legitimate news coverage.” *Truth about war casualties*, USA TODAY, Oct. 23, 2003 at 14A.

“It’s fair enough to ask whether we’ve been too protected from reality, whether protecting a family’s privacy is protecting the public’s innocence and ignorance. ... [H]ow on earth can there be any doubt about showing a sanitized, symbolic array of 20 coffins in a plane or dozens in an aircraft hangar during a month when a hundred American are lost? Has our government flunked the confidence test?” Ellen Goodman, *The Pentagon is trying to rig the ‘Dover Test’*, THE TIMES UNION (Albany, NY), April 30, 2004 at A13.

“Pictures of caskets and body bags remain as some of the most powerful images of our past wars. Seeing coffins draped in American flags brings home the cost of the Iraqi situation more than any article in the New York Times ever will. By not allowing the public to see these pictures, the military is practicing a form of censorship that is insidious and even unpatriotic.” Editorial Board, *End the ban on war pictures*, THE TEMPLE NEWS (Temple University, Philadelphia, PA), October 30, 2003.

“Under the Pentagon clamp down, American fatalities will be reduced to statistics, and the public will see little of the human side of the war. ... But the families of the fallen Americans should not have to grieve alone. We can only share by knowing.” Helen

Thomas, *The families of fallen U.S. soldiers should not grieve alone*, THE MIAMI HERALD, October 31, 2003.

“These are not gory images. They are closed coffins, carefully shrouded in crisp American flags. Viewers of the photos cannot determine whose body lies inside. No grieving family members are present for the camera lens to exploit. The only people in the photos are other members of the military, solemnly carrying the coffins or offering salutes of honor.” Mary Sanchez, *A tug of war over images of the fallen; Respect for losses should trump photo ban*, THE KANSAS CITY STAR, April 27, 2004 at B7.

Polls

A New York Times/CBS News poll taken in December 2003 found that 62 percent of Americans said the public should be allowed to see pictures of the military honor guard receiving caskets of soldiers killed in Iraq as they are returned to the United States.

Twenty-seven percent said the public should not be allowed to see those ceremonies.

The results are available at:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/29/politics/29POLL.html?ex=1094011200&en=6ecfb742febed7ad&ei=5070>