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## Sept 11: 'a good day to bury bad news'

By Andrew Sparrow, Political Correspondent  
Last Updated: 11:24PM BST 09/10/2001

A LABOUR aide who advised the Government to use [the attack on the World Trade Centre](#) to distract attention from "bad" news stories was fighting for her job last night.

Jo Moore, who works for Stephen Byers, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, was widely condemned for showing spin at its worst when her news management memo was leaked.

Miss Moore's memo, written at 2.55pm on September 11, when millions of people were transfixed by the terrible television images of the terrorist attack, said: "It is now a very good day to get out anything we want to bury. Councillors expenses?"

The announcement she referred to related to a minor U-turn on pension rights for councillors.

Miss Moore, 38, apologised and Downing Street said that this would be enough to allow her to keep her job.

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But around Westminster, where there was shock and distaste at her cynicism, it was thought that she would have to go.

The Rev David Smith, whose cousin died in the attack, told the BBC that Miss Moore's attempt to exploit the tragedy represented the very worst in modern politics.

"This is basically burying bad news of a fairly insignificant kind under the bodies of 6,500 people. That is very, very bad for our nation."

Tony Wright, the Labour MP who chairs the Commons public administration committee, said: "An attitude like this is completely incompatible with any idea of public service."

Miss Moore, a former Labour Party official who, as a special adviser, is paid by the taxpayer, was reprimanded by Mr Byers. She also received a formal warning about her conduct from Sir Richard Mottram, the permanent secretary at her department.

Downing Street said that Mr Byers had decided not to sack her because he valued the work she had done for him in the past. Tony Blair was happy to accept that decision because he "has a high regard for Stephen Byers and trusts his judgment".

However, if the pressure on Miss Moore continues to grow, she could well decide to save her boss further embarrassment by resigning.

The situation is particularly difficult for Mr Byers because he faces legal action in the courts from the board of Railtrack and its shareholders over [his decision to put the company into administration](#).

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The [Railtrack announcement was made at the weekend](#), just before [the start of the military action against Afghanistan](#). There has been speculation that the timing of that might have been arranged to minimise bad publicity.

Downing Street denied that. It said there was no attempt to cover up the story because the Government wanted it to attract maximum publicity.

All the same, the Tories have demanded an inquiry into the timing of all Government announcements since September 11.

Tim Collins, the shadow minister for the Cabinet Office, said: "We are surprised and disappointed to discover that certain individuals in Whitehall appear to think it appropriate to use the world crisis to bury controversial decisions."

All governments have put out "bad" news stories on days when they are likely to get little publicity but Miss Moore's memo has caused particular offence.

In her statement, she said: "I would like to sincerely apologise for the offence I have caused. It was wrong to send that email and I accept responsibility for doing so. It was a clear mistake that I regret."

The Prime Minister's official spokesman said: "It certainly was a very serious error of judgment. The question is whether this is so serious that it warrants destroying her career."

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