

White House will decide which journalists get access to it in an unprecedented step

Journalists and media critics warned that White House control of the press pool threatens the foundations of a free press.

By Justine McDaniel
Washington Post

The Trump administration will determine which journalists participate in the White House press pool, press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Tuesday, breaking with nearly a century of practice in which the independent White House Correspondents' Association has overseen the rotating group of news outlets that cover the president in Washington and on travels.

It is an aggressive move by the government to control which news outlets have access to the president — one that is unprecedented in modern American politics and comes amid Trump's long-standing efforts to erode Americans' trust in fact-based reporting.

As journalists and media critics warned that White House control of the press pool threatens the foundations of a free press and could allow the administration to more easily block reporters from the White House, Trump boasted about the move.

"We're going to be calling those shots," he said from the Oval Office late Tuesday afternoon.

For decades, the press pool has been coordinated by the White House Correspondents' Association, which is made up of hundreds of print, television, radio and online journalists and works to ensure press access to the president so that journalists can accurately convey what is happening in Washington to the American people. The WHCA organizes the outlets that regularly cover the president in a rotating group, or pool, of journalists who share their reporting with all the association's members.

White House Correspondents' Association President Eugene Daniels condemned the step after Leavitt's Tuesday afternoon press briefing.

"This move tears at the independence of a free press in the United States. It suggests the government will choose the journalists who cover the president," Daniels said in a statement. "In a free country, leaders must not be able to choose their own press corps."

The White House did not give the organization — which for decades has organized the rotation of reporters, photographers, producers and others who cover the president — any advance notice of the announcement, Daniels said.

It constitutes "a drastic change in how the public obtains information about its government," said Bruce D. Brown, president of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press.

"The White House press pool exists to serve the public, not the presidency," Brown said.

Leavitt did not say the White House will remove any currently participating outlets, but she said the administration will add additional outlets and said her team will pick pool participants on a "day-to-day basis."

The step came two weeks after the Trump administration barred Associated Press journalists from its official events as punishment for the wire service's decision not to refer to the Gulf of Mexico by the name Trump has ordered for federal use, the Gulf of America. On Sunday, the White House Correspondents' Association filed a motion to submit [a legal brief](#) in support of the Associated Press.

Leavitt made the announcement about the press pool after celebrating a federal judge's decision Monday to deny the AP's bid to have its access restored immediately. She stood in front of two screens that showed an image of the Gulf of Mexico, labeled "Gulf of America," stamped with the word "VICTORY" in large type, a reference to the ruling.

Trump talked about the Associated Press when asked about the press pool decision later in the day, saying the AP "has been terrible" and falsely labeling it as "radical left." ([The AP's lawsuit](#) against the White House is continuing.)

The press pool has traditionally included reporters and photographers from wire services — the Associated Press, Reuters, Bloomberg News — as well as representatives from radio and television networks, and a rotating slot among print journalists from outlets such as The Post, the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal.

When the president travels, a 13-member pool tracks his movements; for events in Washington, an expanded pool is assembled. Journalists from the outlets take turns being in the pool, and whoever is in the pool on a given day shares their reporting with the rest of the outlets.

It was not clear how the White House would run its new pool and whether the administration plans to split the pool slots among a larger number of outlets. Leavitt said the media outlets currently participating in the pool will be permitted to stay while other print, radio and streaming outlets will be added.

The president and his allies have a long history of hostility toward members of the mainstream media. Trump regularly led his campaign rally crowds to boo at reporters and has sought to make his supporters believe that fact-based reporters are biased against him. The administration this month began [investigating](#) major television and radio companies, including NBC, ABC, PBS and NPR, for evidence of [diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives](#).

Tuesday's decision immediately drew concerns for its potential to allow the administration to shut out outlets whose coverage it dislikes.

“Having served as a Moscow correspondent in the early days of Putin’s reign, this reminds me of how the Kremlin took over its own press pool and made sure that only compliant journalists were given access,” Peter Baker, the New York Times’s chief White House correspondent, [said on X](#).

Leavitt attempted to paint the decision in a different light, alleging that the White House was expanding, rather than controlling, access by the press.

She claimed Washington journalists have held a “monopoly” of access to the White House and cast the Trump administration as granting others “a seat at this highly coveted table.” She cast the ability to cover the president as a privilege that journalists should be honored to receive, rather than a democratic obligation.

“We want more outlets and new outlets to have a chance to take part in the press pool to cover this administration’s unprecedented achievements up close, front and center,” Leavitt said. “I am proud to announce that we are going to give the power back to the people who read your papers, who watch your television shows, and who listen to your radio stations.”

Ron Fournier, a former Washington bureau chief for the Associated Press, said Leavitt’s rhetoric was a spin attempt.

“It’s awfully ironic how she cast this move today as an effort to have a more diverse and equitable press corps when you’re the anti-DEI administration. The fact is they have no interest in the press corps being diverse. What they want it to be is exclusively pro-MAGA,” Fournier told The Post. “We’ve never had a time when a White House so brazenly and so ruthlessly decided it was going to decide who covers them.”

Fournier warned that the White House could use the same reasoning to seize further control of information access, noting that news outlets must get audio and video feeds and written transcripts of the president’s appearances from the administration.

“What we’re heading to here is, for the first time in the nation’s history, the White House being able to decide who covers the president up close. And that’s not good for anybody,” Fournier said. “We’re not starting down a slippery slope, we’re near the bottom of it already, and folks need to wake up.”