

June 29, 2017

President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We, the undersigned press freedom groups, write to urge you to reverse course on the White House's decision to periodically bar journalists from using audio or video recordings of the White House daily press briefings. These briefings, along with the clarity and immediacy that comes from a camera or microphone, are powerful windows into the operations of the White House and your administration. We fear that the decision to bar the use of audio or video represents part of a move by the White House to obscure such transparency for the American public. That would be a mistake.

This policy is of particular concern in that it forms part of a pattern of hostility that you and some members of your administration have shown toward the news media, including denunciations of the press as "fake news," the "opposition party," and the "enemy of the people." We have also witnessed an alarming uptick in instances of law enforcement or government officials threatening, or even assaulting, members of the press.

As you are well aware, the newest member of Congress, Rep. Greg Gianforte (R-MT), "body-slammed" a reporter after the reporter asked him a question about the House's health care bill. Other troubling instances include the manhandling of a reporter by federal guards at a Federal Communications Commission briefing and the denigration of a State Department reporter by a senior official of your administration.

Historically, the trend at the White House, has always been toward more access for the press, not less. The Wilson administration during the early years of the last century ushered in the modern press conference. The American people have come to rely on the video and audio telecast of the daily press briefings now for almost 20 years.

The role of the press in asking questions and probing issues on behalf of the public is invaluable; there is no substitute for the give-and-take of a press conference in allowing the questions most on the minds of the American people to be asked and answered in real time, without the forethought and crafting that goes into scripted written messages.

The decision to bar use of audio and video of some of the daily briefings is one of several constraints on press access to White House activities. Though you have held brief conferences with foreign leaders, you have not held a full press conference since February. The once-daily press briefings have become shorter, less formal and less regular. Additionally, a previously public document such as the White House daily schedule has been tagged as "non-reportable," and the White House has ended the practice of publicly posting visitor logs.

We strongly urge you to keep press briefings as regular and open as possible, including by affording access to a wide breadth of media outlets and to all forms of recording and distribution, on camera and on-mic. Government transparency is more important than ever in these uncertain days. We urge you to reverse course, by continuing and expanding the historical trend of openness and transparency in government as well as in support of a free and unfettered press envisioned by our founding fathers as set forth in the First Amendment.

Please do not hesitate to contact Gabe Rottman, PEN America's Washington director, with any questions. He can be reached at [grottman@pen.org](mailto:grottman@pen.org).

Sincerely,

Committee to Protect Journalists  
Free Press  
National Press Photographers Association  
PEN America  
Reporters Without Borders  
Society of Professional Journalists