



SINCE 1909

THE NATIONAL
JOURNALISM CENTER

3909 N. MERIDIAN ST.

INDIANAPOLIS, IND. 46208

317-927-8000

FAX: 317-920-4789

SPJ@SPJ.ORG

WWW.SPJ.ORG

President-elect Donald Trump
Vice President-elect Mike Pence
Presidential Transition Headquarters
1800 F St., NW, Room G117
Washington, D.C. 20270-0117

January, 18, 2017

Dear Mr. President-elect and Mr. Vice President-elect,

In December 2015, a delegation representing more than 50 journalism and open government organizations [met with Josh Earnest](#), President Obama's press secretary, urging greater openness and transparency from the federal government.

The group shared its concerns to Earnest and his staff regarding the administration's communications policies, including:

- officials blocking reporters' requests to talk to specific staff people;
- excessive delays in answering interview requests that stretch past reporters' deadlines;
- officials conveying information "on background," refusing to give reporters what should be public information unless they agree not to say who is speaking;
- federal agencies blackballing reporters who write critically of them;
- and other policies that prevent information from flowing to the public.

Since that meeting, however, little has been done to improve these issues.

Our Founding Fathers knew the importance of a press that is free to report on the activities of our government and elected officials. "Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost," said Thomas Jefferson in a January 28, 1786, letter. Yet here we are, almost exactly 231 years after Jefferson [wrote those words](#), and attempts to stifle the flow of information to citizens of the United States continue.

But 2017 is a new year, and you are at the helm of a new administration. We would like to pick up where we left off with the Obama

administration and continue the discussion regarding issues relevant to freedom of the press.

Most important on that list are:

- the ability of reporters to directly interact with government employees who are subject matter experts, rather than interacting with Public Information Officers (or having all conversations monitored by PIOs);
- access to the activities of the President;
- and ensuring that the Federal Freedom of Information Act remains as strong as possible.

In addition, we would like to have a conversation regarding how we can work together to ensure that self-government as outlined by the Constitution survives and flourishes, and that a free press remains a cornerstone of our nation and our liberty.

Information-control practices have gone too far and must be curtailed for the good of our democracy and reputation in the world. You can act now, as you begin your term, to shift the federal government away from secrecy toward transparency and accountability.

Here are links to some of the letters sent to President Obama: [The first letter](#), sent Nov. 21, 2013, addressed concerns regarding White House restrictions on photographers. The [next letter](#), sent July 8, 2014, and a [follow-up letter](#) sent Aug. 5, 2014, regarding PIO and transparency issues were met with a [response](#) from the White House on Aug. 11, 2014, that the groups found unsatisfactory. This [white paper and other articles](#) also provide background on the issue.

We urge you to publicly affirm your commitment to transparency, to issue an executive order prohibiting the restrictive public information policies that have been the status quo, and to engage in a public discussion with us about the Trump Administration's commitment to the free flow of information from the White House and all federal government, to the American people.

We would be happy to send a delegation to Washington, D.C., to have this discussion, or we invite Mr. Pence to meet with us the next time he is back in his hometown, which is also home of the Society of Professional Journalists' national headquarters. We are also open to a video conference call as well.

It is the hope of the thousands of members of the 61 organizations below that together, we can work to improve the lines of communication between the White House and the press. Democracy depends on it.

Sincerely,

Alaska Press Club

American Copy Editors Society

American Society of Business Publication Editors

American Society of Media Photographers

American Society of News Editors

Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists Association

Asian American Journalists Association

Associated Press Media Editors

Associated Press Photo Managers

Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

Association of Alternative News Media

Association of Health Care Journalists

Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication

Broadcast Education Association

Center for Scholastic Journalism

College Media Association

Colorado Press Women

Defending Rights & Dissent

Education Writers Association

Florida Press Association

Hoosier State Press Association

Investigative Reporters and Editors

iSolon

Journalism and Women Symposium
Journalism Education Association
Local Independent Online News Publishers
Local Media Association
Michigan Press Association
Media of Nebraska Inc.
National Association of Black Journalists
National Association of Hispanic Journalists
National Association of Science Writers
National Newspaper Association
National Press Photographers Association
National Scholastic Press Association/Associated Collegiate Press
National Writers Union
Native American Journalists Association
Nebraska Press Association
Nevada Press Association
New Jersey Press Association
News Media Alliance
News Media Coalition
News Media Guild Local 31222
NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists
North American Agricultural Journalists
Online News Association
Poynter
Radio Television Digital News Association
Religion News Association
Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press
Reporters Without Borders
Society of Environmental Journalists

Society of Professional Journalists
South Carolina Press Association
South Dakota Newspaper Association
Student Press Law Center
The NewsGuild-CWA
The NewsGuild of New York
Tully Center for Free Speech
United Media Guild - TNG-CWA
UNITY Journalists for Diversity

* Since the letter was sent to the president-elect, more journalism groups have expressed their support in joining the cause, including:

American Society of Journalists and Authors
Arizona Press Club
Global Student Square
International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors
Military Reporters and Editors
National Society of Newspaper Columnists
Peoria Newspaper Guild, Local 86
Society of Business Editors and Writers
Society for Collegiate Journalists

This brings the total number of signatories to 70 groups.