White House bars CNN, MS NOW, Politico reporters from state dinner

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Only hours after restoring the press passes of reporters for CNN, MS NOW and Politico, Trump administration officials denied access to reporters for all three media outlets when they attempted to cover the arrival of Chinese President Xi Jinping for a state dinner in his honor at the White House.

According to CNN, the White House asked for names of the reporting team from the network, and the network named a reporter, producer and camera crew. A White House official later told the network that only a photographer and audio technician would be permitted, excluding the editorial team of reporter and producer. ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox all had full editorial teams at the event.

It was the second time on Thursday that the White House seemed to directly defy the temporary restraining order issued by federal District Judge Timothy Kelly, a Trump appointee, at 1 a.m. that day. Kelly found that the three media outlets were likely to prevail in their legal challenge to Trump's ban on their access to the White House, and instructed the administration to restore press passes to the reporters who had been excluded.

Reporters from all three outlets were denied entry to the White House grounds when they attempted to begin work on Thursday morning, after 7 a.m. The media outlets went back to Judge Kelly, and he ordered the administration to respond by 12:30 p.m. to the charge that it had failed to comply with his order. Barely half an hour before that deadline, the White House restored press credentials and reporters from CNN, MS NOW and Politico were allowed onto the grounds.

Kelly's written opinion was remarkably blunt in dismissing the administration's claim that the three media outlets had endangered national security through their reporting. He noted that Trump had not raised the issue in his initial order to exclude the reporters, referring only to "negative" coverage of his administration.

"Nothing in the record that predates this suit suggests that the revocation of Plaintiffs' hard passes was motivated by national security concerns," he wrote. He added, "Certainly, that is not what President Trump said when he announced that he was 'banning' Plaintiffs from the White House—instead, he focused on the alleged lack of truthfulness and negativity of Plaintiffs' reporting."

After CNN, MS NOW and Politico filed a joint lawsuit on Monday against the White House ban, the Department of Justice responded by sending letters to each of the three detailing supposed incidents of reporting which endangered national security, including revelations about Trump's new East Wing ballroom, a leak investigation at the FBI, and the exhaustion of US weapons stockpiles because of the Iran war.

These claims were quickly undermined as media reports revealed that some of the anonymous sources for articles Trump denounced as "FAKE NEWS" were high-level administration officials, including Vice President JD Vance. Moreover, other networks and publications made similar reports without suffering exclusion or any other penalty.

Judge Kelly appeared highly critical of the administration claims at a hearing Wednesday where the media plaintiffs sought a temporary restraining order to block Trump's ban on their reporters. Trump himself appeared to expect a negative ruling, posting an attack on social media in which he described Kelly as "totally disloyal" (since he was a Trump appointee ruling against his lord and master) and promising to appeal.

CNN, MS NOW and Politico had wide support from

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other media outlets, with more than 50 joining in an amicus brief filed with Judge Kelly, in which they backed the argument that Trump's exclusion order was a gross violation of the First Amendment, which guarantees freedom of the press. Trump was free to exclude all media from the White House, they argued, but could not pick and choose, admitting some media and excluding others, based on their viewpoints.

Trump doubled down on his slanders against the media, writing on Truth Social, "We'll go for appeal because Fake News people and publications that only write negatively, and who violate our National Security by writing false and defamatory stories with unknown 'sources' shouldn't be allowed access to the most important Office anywhere in the World."

At least one of the supposedly illegal or fabricated anonymous leaks was actually a background briefing organized by the White House itself, on condition that the "senior administration official" (Vance) would not be named.

Other press reports said that Trump was further angered by the reaction of the major television networks that provide rotating "pool" coverage of all his actions. When CNN was denied its turn Monday to provide pool coverage, the other four networks in the pool—ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox—suspended all pool coverage.

This meant that there was little or no live video taken of Trump's public activities in New York City on Monday and Tuesday, except for his speech to the General Assembly, where the broadcast feed was supplied by the United Nations. There was no film of Trump's meetings on the sidelines of the General Assembly, or of his greeting Xi Jinping on his arrival Wednesday at Andrews Air Force Base, just outside Washington.

Pool coverage remained suspended Thursday, despite the White House claim to be restoring press passes to CNN, MS NOW and Politico. The verbal assurances were contradicted by its actions, both in relation to limiting access to the White House and Trump's threat to appeal the temporary restraining order—which itself is only valid for 14 days.

While the corporate media was highly vocal this week about their First Amendment rights, it is notable that they have not taken a similar position against the repression of anti-war, anti-genocide and anti-ICE demonstrators, regularly targeted by federal agents and local and state police.

The media pushback against Trump is less a defense of democratic rights than an indication that sections of the financial aristocracy are increasingly dissatisfied with his failure to win the war against Iran, his turn away from the war against Russia in Ukraine, and his inability to carry out sweeping cuts in Medicare and Social Security.

Even more concerning to the oligarchs is the mounting movement from below which has been fueled by economic discontent and popular outrage at Trump's brazen attacks on democratic rights, particularly in the police-state treatment of immigrants. Trump has faced the largest opposition protests in American history, and there is growing support among workers and youth for a socialist alternative to the capitalist system, diverted for now into votes for the DSA wing of the Democratic Party, but threatening a broader social eruption.

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