

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

November 19, 2018

Dear Mr. Acosta:

We received a letter from your counsel yesterday responding to our notice letter of November 16, 2018. That letter says, among other things, that “there are no so-called ‘widely understood practices’” governing the conduct of journalists covering the White House. This statement impresses us as incorrect. Over many years, members of the White House press corps have attended countless press events with the President and other officials without engaging in the behavior you displayed at the November 7, 2018 press conference, which gave rise to the suspension of your hard pass.

We would have greatly preferred to continue hosting White House press conferences in reliance on a set of understood professional norms, and we believe the overwhelming majority of journalists covering the White House share that preference. But, given your insistence that shared practices be replaced by “explicit . . . standards,” this letter attempts to convert into rules the widely understood practices described in our prior letter, and which your counsel’s letter inexplicably concludes were non-existent.

Please be advised of the following rules governing future press conferences:

- (1) A journalist called upon to ask a question will ask a single question and then will yield the floor to other journalists;
- (2) At the discretion of the President or other White House official taking questions, a follow-up question or questions may be permitted; and where a follow up has been allowed and asked, the questioner will then yield the floor;
- (3) “Yielding the floor” includes, when applicable, physically surrendering the microphone to White House staff for use by the next questioner;
- (4) Failure to abide by any of rules (1)-(3) may result in suspension or revocation of the journalist’s hard pass.

We are aware that Rules (2) and (4) afford the White House a degree of discretion in enforcing these rules and we see no substitute for reserving such discretion. A press conference is not a mechanical exercise. We are likewise mindful that a more elaborate set of rules might be devised, including, for example, specific provisions for journalist conduct in the open (non-press room) areas of the White House and for Air Force One. At this time, we have decided not to frame such rules in the hope that professional journalistic norms will suffice to regulate conduct in those places. If unprofessional behavior occurs in those settings, or if a court should decide that explicit rules are required to regulate conduct even there, we will be forced to reconsider this decision.

Until then, the view from here is that White House interaction with the press is, and generally should be, subject to a kind of natural give-and-take. President Trump believes strongly in the First Amendment and interacts with the press in just such a way. It would be a great loss for all if, instead of this give-and-take, and instead of relying on the professionalism of White House journalists, we were compelled to devise a lengthy and detailed code of conduct for White House events.

Having received a formal reply from your counsel to our letter of November 16, we have made a final determination in this process: your hard pass is restored. Should you refuse to follow these rules in the future, we will take action in accordance with the rules set forth above. The President is aware of this decision and concurs.

Happy Thanksgiving.

Very truly yours,

Bill Shine
Assistant to the President
Deputy Chief of Staff for Communications

Sarah Huckabee Sanders
Assistant to the President
White House Press Secretary