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October 16, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

I urge you to rescind the media access agreement put forward by the Department of Defense (DoD), which would restrict the freedom of reporters and their longstanding access to the Pentagon. This move chills press freedoms, undermines our democracy, and prevents Americans from understanding the actions of the U.S. military and the use of their taxpayer dollars.

On September 18, 2025, your Department issued a new media policy that requires Pentagon reporters to sign an agreement pledging they would not publish information without authorization by a department official, even if it is unclassified. The agreement also requires journalists to be escorted by department officials in certain areas of the Pentagon. DoD threatened to suspend or revoke the press passes of any journalist who refused to sign this agreement. After receiving extensive backlash from members of the media, DoD modified the language of the agreement last week to require reporters to affirm their understanding of the new rules even if they “do not necessarily agree with such policies and procedures.” Even with the revised agreement, it is clear that journalists who engage in their First Amendment rights and publish any information, including unclassified information, without government approval risk losing their Pentagon press credentials. In a joint statement, ABC News, CBS News, CNN, NBC News, and Fox News committed to declining to agree to the Pentagon’s new requirements, which they believe would “restrict journalists’ ability to keep the nation and the world informed of important national security issues.” The Pentagon has since confiscated the badges of reporters who refused to sign the access agreement.

In an authoritarian fashion, the Trump administration wants reporters to run all coverage past DoD officials to purposefully silence independent coverage of defense activities and investigations of military operations. This crackdown represents an attempt to institutionalize propaganda and obscure the truth. News organizations across the spectrum have expressed their fears around the policy change. Pentagon officials have already removed workspaces for The New York Times, NBC News, the Hill, and CNN. These outlets were replaced with media organizations that have given favorable coverage to the Trump administration, including One America News Network, the only media organization confirmed to have signed the new access agreement. Only allowing one network to access the Pentagon will limit balanced and critical

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reporting around the actions of the federal government and U.S. military, as well as scrutiny around the nearly one trillion taxpayer dollars the Department receives to conduct its operations annually.

DoD claims its policy changes are intended to safeguard national security information. Yet, the Department has failed to provide any evidence that journalists currently present a threat to necessitate further restrictions. In September, you tweeted “The press is no longer allowed to roam the halls of a secure facility. Wear a badge and follow the rules — or go home.”

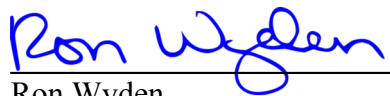
Suggesting that reporters are barging into classified areas is utterly false. Former senior Pentagon officials have rejected this statement. Pentagon journalists have long worn their badges and been restricted to unclassified spaces. Soliciting a comment from department officials has been a common and constitutional practice for Pentagon journalists. Curtailing this practice would be unprecedented and would harm investigative journalism.

DoD’s policy changes violate the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which offers broad protections against prior restraint of the press. These protections, established in the U.S. Supreme Court case of *Near v. Minnesota*, also apply to classified military documents. In *New York Times Co. v. United States*, a landmark case regarding press freedoms in the context of the Vietnam War, the Supreme Court affirmed that the U.S. Government’s efforts to prevent the publication of classified material were unconstitutional.

For decades, Pentagon reporters have maintained the same level of access to the military. The ability to engage and build relationships with military officials and civilians in the Pentagon enables journalists to deliver accurate information to the American people to aid their understanding of the realities U.S. troops are facing. The United States’ longstanding commitment to press freedoms has allowed reporters to uncover botched military operations that have led to unnecessary military and civilian deaths and wasteful government projects that administrations of both parties would likely prefer to keep hidden from the public eye. DoD’s new media policy undermines this critical transparency with the American public.

As the son of a journalist who has devoted his career to defending press freedoms, I urge your Department to critically evaluate my concerns and those raised by reporters and former senior Pentagon officials, and abandon any effort to restrict reporters’ access to the Pentagon and their right to freely report information to the American public.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator