

A gulf widens between Trump and the press, with high stakes for free speech

By Story Hinckley, *Christian Science Monitor*, Feb. 22, 2025 (shortened)

Attacks on the media have long been part of President Donald Trump’s political **playbook**, from his relentless **mocking** of “fake news” to him singling out reporters and **withholding** access over coverage he **deems** unfair. Now, one month into Mr. Trump’s second term, his war on the press seems to be entering a new phase, with the president and his allies taking more aggressive actions—
5 and **notching** clear wins.

Mr. Trump has **sued** several media outlets in the past year, winning a settlement against ABC News that shocked many industry observers. The new **chair** of the Federal Communications Commission has opened an investigation into whether taxpayer dollars should continue to go to NPR and PBS, and the Pentagon has **booted** legacy media outlets from their permanent workspaces
10 in the building to make room for more Trump-friendly outlets.

Perhaps most controversially, the White House has gotten into a tense **standoff** in recent weeks with The Associated Press over Mr. Trump’s executive order renaming the “Gulf of Mexico” the “Gulf of America.” After the AP announced it would continue using the “Gulf of Mexico,” while acknowledging that President Trump has renamed it the “Gulf of America,” the administration
15 **barred** AP reporters from attending Oval Office and some other events and flying on Air Force One.

Both the AP and the White House Correspondents’ Association say the Trump administration’s actions are a violation of the First Amendment. The administration has countered that there is a big difference between giving an outlet access to limited spaces and preventing it from publishing the news as it sees fit. So far, most of the **leverage** seems to be on the president’s side, against a press
20 corps that’s weaker than it has been in decades, with fragmented audiences and **shrinking subscriptions**. And observers see larger reasons to be concerned about the freedom of the press, a critical component of a healthy democracy.

Many other newsrooms are also still using the “Gulf of Mexico” in their reporting. But the AP has been the focus of the president’s **ire**, in part because of its widely adopted stylebook, which has
25 been the **authoritative** guide on grammar and terminology for scores of newsrooms since the 1950s.

Trump allies, among others, have complained that the AP Stylebook has employed increasingly ideological phrasing in recent years—such as using the term “gender-affirming care” when describing medical treatments for transgender people, and capitalizing “Black” but not “white.” The Gulf drama isn’t just about the Gulf, White House officials told Axios this week; it’s another
30 example of the AP using language “to push a partisan worldview.”

“The AP gets to decide its own style,” says Kevin Goldberg of the Freedom Forum, a **nonprofit** that advocates for the First Amendment. “If [the White House] doesn’t like the AP style, they are free to say that. ... But they can’t **compel** the AP to say particular words. That’s First Amendment
101.”

For now, many constitutional law experts say the administration isn’t violating the First Amendment, though it may be **edging** closer to that line.

“As much as I oppose the [AP] exclusion personally, I am skeptical that it is unconstitutional,” says Eugene Volokh, a law professor at the University of California, Los Angeles. “This is something we say as law professors all the time: ‘The fact that something is a bad idea doesn’t
40 mean it’s unconstitutional.’”