

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. _____

To restore press access to the Pentagon, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. SCHATZ (for himself, Mr. SCHIFF, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Mr. OSSOFF, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Ms. DUCKWORTH, Mr. KAINE, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Ms. WARREN, Mr. COONS, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. WYDEN, Mr. MERKLEY, and Ms. ROSEN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To restore press access to the Pentagon, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Protecting Pentagon
5 Press Access Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. PURPOSE.**

7 The purposes of this Act are—

8 (1) to promote accurate and independent re-
9 porting about the defense policy and military serv-

1 ices of the United States by restoring to credentialed
2 journalists access to the Pentagon that successive
3 administrations permitted until 2025; and
4 (2) to remove unreasonable restrictions on
5 credentialed journalists imposed by Secretary of De-
6 fense Peter Hegseth, including restrictions imposed
7 by the May 23, 2025, Secretary of Defense Memo-
8 randum titled “Updated Physical Control Measures
9 for Press/Media Access Within the Pentagon” and
10 the October 6, 2025, Secretary of Defense Memo-
11 randum titled “Implementation of New Media In-
12 brief”.

13 **SEC. 3. FINDINGS.**

14 Congress makes the following findings:

15 (1) The Founders of the United States en-
16 shrined freedom of the press in the First Amend-
17 ment to the Constitution of the United States be-
18 cause they recognized that democracy requires a free
19 and vibrant press capable of uncovering and dissemi-
20 nating the knowledge necessary for citizens to hold
21 the government to account.

22 (2) Independent journalists were invited to
23 work from inside the Pentagon before the building
24 opened during World War II because Secretary of
25 War Henry Stimson understood the need for accu-

1 rate reporting on the national security efforts of the
2 United States and recognized the value to both the
3 public and leaders of the Armed Forces in providing
4 reporters close proximity to key sources of informa-
5 tion.

6 (3) Since the founding of the Department of
7 Defense, credentialed journalists have been allowed
8 to access unsecured areas of the Pentagon to con-
9 duct thorough, reliable, and timely reporting.

10 (4) From the earliest days of the Pentagon, the
11 Department has also provided credentialed journal-
12 ists with dedicated physical space, opening a com-
13 bined National Defense press room in 1948 and pro-
14 viding cubicles, desks, telephone lines, and other
15 tools for reporters to work from inside the building.

16 (5) In 1972, Secretary of Defense Melvin
17 Laird, under President Richard Nixon, designated
18 the Pentagon press space as the “Correspondents’
19 Corridor”, and said, “We here at the Department of
20 Defense firmly believe the government and the press
21 are interlocking parts of our nation’s constitutional
22 system of checks and balances. When civilian and
23 military members of this department take the oath
24 to support the Constitution of the United States,

1 that also, of course, includes the First Amend-
2 ment.”.

3 (6) Robert Sims, Assistant Secretary of De-
4 fense for Public Affairs for President Ronald
5 Reagan, endorsed the view of Secretary Laird and
6 explained that effective reporting requires access be-
7 yond press briefings because the ability to quickly
8 get the views of senior officials with “significant pol-
9 icy information” promotes the accuracy and quality
10 of reporting from the Pentagon.

11 (7) Over the course of many decades, the De-
12 partment of Defense had diligently worked to pre-
13 serve the access of reporters to the Pentagon, even
14 during extraordinary circumstances, including by en-
15 suring reporters were able to return to the Pentagon
16 within hours of the attacks of September 11, 2001,
17 and by maintaining access for reporters throughout
18 the COVID–19 pandemic.

19 (8) In a policy imposed by Secretary Hegseth in
20 2025, the Department, for the first time, restricted
21 credentialed journalists from actively “soliciting” un-
22 authorized information or engaging in activity the
23 Department considers “unprofessional”.

24 (9) In 2026, the Department announced a new
25 policy that would require journalists to work in an

1 annex facility outside the Pentagon, redesignated the
2 Pentagon Press Office as a secure space, and re-
3 quired reporters for the first time to have a military
4 escort when present anywhere within the Pentagon.

5 (10) Secretary Hegseth identified no new secu-
6 rity risk or misconduct that required such a policy.

7 (11) At the same time, the Department has
8 drastically curtailed formal live on-camera press
9 briefings with credentialed journalists.

10 **SEC. 4. SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

11 It is the sense of Congress that—

12 (1) a press whose ability to investigate and pub-
13 lish is overly constrained by government regulation
14 is neither free nor vibrant;

15 (2) United States citizens have a right to better
16 understand the policies, programs, and operations
17 being pursued by the Department of Defense, the
18 objectives of the leaders of the Department, the ef-
19 fectiveness of such leadership, and how the Depart-
20 ment employs and deploys personnel and spends the
21 tax dollars of citizens;

22 (3) press access to the Pentagon informs and
23 serves the public interests described in paragraph
24 (2);

1 (4) reliable, independent, and comprehensive re-
2 porting on the Department of Defense—

3 (A) has led to policy and program changes
4 that have directly served the national interest
5 and improved the quality of life and service for
6 members of the Armed Forces;

7 (B) promotes the broad public under-
8 standing and support of the Armed Forces
9 needed to attain the national security objectives
10 of the United States; and

11 (C) requires information beyond official
12 government briefings and materials, including
13 information facilitated by the ability of report-
14 ers to work and gather news inside the Pen-
15 tagon; and

16 (5) press access to the Pentagon is essential for
17 meaningful oversight and enables reporting that in-
18 forms Congress in carrying out its legislative author-
19 ity, including by surfacing information that serves as
20 the basis for investigative inquiries, reports, hear-
21 ings, and legislation.

22 **SEC. 5. RESTORING PENTAGON PRESS ACCESS.**

23 Not later than 30 days after the date of the enact-
24 ment of this Act, the Secretary of Defense shall—

1 (1) restore to the press access to areas of the
2 Pentagon that were accessible to appropriately
3 credentialed journalists on May 22, 2025, including
4 the “Correspondents’ Corridor” and other des-
5 ignated press working spaces;

6 (2) restore to appropriately credentialed jour-
7 nalists unescorted access to areas of the Pentagon
8 that were accessible without an escort on May 22,
9 2025;

10 (3) require the Secretary to ensure the integrity
11 of the process to issue to reporters a Pentagon Fa-
12 cilities Alternative Credential, including by—

13 (A) designating the Pentagon Force Pro-
14 tection Agency as responsible for the security
15 review;

16 (B) ensuring that the security review de-
17 scribed in subparagraph (A) is conducted by ca-
18 reer officials without unnecessary delays, polit-
19 ical influence, or other influence by the Office
20 of Public Affairs of the Department of Defense;
21 and

22 (C) requiring that the security review de-
23 scribed in subparagraph (A) is timely, deter-
24 minative, not subject to reversal by or at the di-
25 rection of political appointees, and not subject

1 to agreement with any policy that seeks to re-
2 strict First Amendment activities; and
3 (4) prohibit any changes to press access at the
4 Pentagon, including the designation of press work
5 spaces, access areas, and press credentials, without
6 prior consultation with the Committee on Armed
7 Services of the Senate and the Committee on Armed
8 Services of the House of Representatives.