

March 16, 2020

To members of the congressional press corps:

With concerns about the coronavirus outbreak dominating the national conversation, the press galleries are asking all news organizations to take extra precautions when conducting business on Capitol Hill.

Last week, House and Senate Sergeant at Arms announced the closing of the Capitol complex to outside tour groups for the foreseeable future. These changes do not impact working press on Capitol Hill, but may create difficulties entering congressional buildings for any journalists without a valid congressional press pass.

No new restrictions have been put in place regarding interviews and reporting in the halls of the House or Senate. However, there are concerns about the nature of “walk-and-talks” and large scrums with lawmakers, because of the close quarters involved that can allow easier spread of serious illnesses.

With that in mind, news organizations should review their coverage plans for Capitol Hill to balance reporter safety with newsgathering needs. Any working press in the Capitol or congressional office buildings need to be mindful of how close they are to lawmakers and staff (and each other) while conducting interviews.

In some cases, lawmakers may be more reluctant to conduct lengthy sessions with large press scrums due to health concerns. Reporters should be understanding of those worries while at the same time reinforcing the need for proper oversight of our elected officials.

No restrictions will be placed on the number of reporters allowed in the complex, but organizations should discuss how many of their employees need a permanent presence in the press galleries, and what work may be done remotely.

The congressional press galleries will remain open and staffed as long as both chambers continue working. Please respect their work to continue to protect press access on Capitol Hill while looking for ways to increase safety and security for everyone in the Capitol complex. And should you have any questions, feel free to reach out to them directly.

Sincerely,

Sarah Wire,
Chair, Daily Press Gallery Standing Committee of Correspondents

Leo Shane III
Chair, Periodical Press Gallery Executive Committee

J. Scott Applewhite
Chair, Standing Committee of Press Photographers