



June 27, 2017

Mr. Sean Spicer
Press Secretary and Acting Director of Communications
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Spicer,

Transparency is a bedrock value in our democracy. Our system relies on an informed public to hold elected officials accountable.

So we are alarmed by the White House's decision to ban television cameras and live audio from the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room on multiple occasions this month.

By our count, there have been only five on-camera briefings for the entire month of June. This is a high-profile departure from the well-settled practice of Republican and Democratic administrations to brief the press regularly in the open.

There is no justification for the White House's decision to shroud an increasing number of briefings from the public. You were asked about the camera and live audio bans last week. You did not provide any rationale. Instead, you said you were doing what "we can to communicate our message" and that the Administration has "tremendous respect for the First Amendment."¹

The camera and live audio bans smack of contempt for the First Amendment as well as the American people—not "respect."

Ironically, the President says he uses Twitter because journalists "hate that [he] can get the honest and unfiltered message out."²

Here's what would be honest and unfiltered: allow C-SPAN and other cameras back into the briefing room when you respond to journalists' questions in real time.

The camera and live audio bans are part of a disturbing pattern out of the Trump Administration to attack institutions that serve as a check on power. Whether it is the President's Tweet that the media is the "enemy of the American People" or rhetorical broadsides against the federal judiciary, Americans are increasingly aware of the hostility

¹ Press Briefing by Press Secretary Sean Spicer, June 20, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/06/20/press-briefing-press-secretary-sean-spicer-55>.

² President Donald J. Trump, Twitter, June 6, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/872059997429022722>.

that the Trump Administration has shown to those whose job it is to safeguard and uncover the truth. With so many government decisions being made out of sight, on-camera press briefings are an important way that citizens can stay informed about the Administration's work.

On behalf of Common Cause's 850,000 members and supporters nationwide who put country over party, I urge you to drop the bans against cameras and live audio, and open your press briefings to the sunlight that Justice Brandeis called the "best of disinfectants."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen Hobert Flynn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Karen Hobert Flynn
President
Common Cause