

119TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

# S. 5288

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

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## IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

AUGUST 6, 2026

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 Armed Services

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## 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-

ices of the United States by restoring to credentialed journalists access to the Pentagon that successive administrations permitted until 2025; and

(2) to remove unreasonable restrictions on credentialed journalists imposed by Secretary of Defense Peter Hegseth, including restrictions imposed by the May 23, 2025, Secretary of Defense Memorandum titled “Updated Physical Control Measures for Press/Media Access Within the Pentagon” and the October 6, 2025, Secretary of Defense Memorandum titled “Implementation of New Media In-brief”.

**SEC. 3. FINDINGS.**

Congress makes the following findings:

(1) The Founders of the United States enshrined freedom of the press in the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States because they recognized that democracy requires a free and vibrant press capable of uncovering and disseminating the knowledge necessary for citizens to hold the government to account.

(2) Independent journalists were invited to work from inside the Pentagon before the building opened during World War II because Secretary of 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.

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