

Judge orders White House to restore media access to U.S. news agency



Washington, April 9 (RHC)-- A U.S. federal judge has ordered the White House to restore full access to The Associated Press (AP) to report on presidential events, almost two months after the news agency was banned by U.S. President Donald Trump for refusing to rename the Gulf of Mexico the Gulf of America in its reports.

On Tuesday, United States District Judge Trevor N McFadden, who was appointed by President Trump, ruled that it would be a violation of the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment free speech rights if the government discriminates against news organisations for the content of their reports.

"Under the First Amendment, if the Government opens its doors to some journalists – be it to the Oval Office, the East Room, or elsewhere – it cannot then shut those doors to other journalists because of their viewpoints," McFadden wrote in his ruling. "The Constitution requires no less," he said.

"It does not bestow special treatment upon the AP," he wrote. "But it cannot be treated worse than its peer wire service either." McFadden also said this decision does not ban government officials from choosing which outlets to give interviews or answers to.

It was not known when the White House would abide by the judge's ruling, which will not be implemented for a week to give the government time to respond or appeal. "The decision, while a preliminary injunction, handed the AP a major victory at a time the White House has been challenging the press on several levels," the news organisation said in a report on the judge's ruling.

The AP's win comes after Trump called the news agency "radical left lunatics" following the organisation's refusal to adjust its reporting in line with Trump's executive order to rename the Gulf of Mexico. "We're going to keep them out until such time as they agree it's the Gulf of America," Trump said at the time.

AP spokeswoman Lauren Easton said the news agency is "gratified by the court's decision", and said the ruling "affirms the fundamental right of the press and public to speak freely without government retaliation".

Katie Fallow, deputy litigation director at the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University, said, "the First Amendment means the White House can't ban news outlets from covering the president simply because they don't parrot his preferred language".

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt, who was named in the lawsuit along with White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles and Deputy Chief of Staff Taylor Budowich, did not immediately comment on the matter.

Despite the win, the AP reported on Tuesday that one of its reporters and a photographer were turned away from joining a motorcade with the White House press pool shortly after the ruling.

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