

Congress of the United States

PRESS GALLERIES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-7238

January 14, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader, United States Senate

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Democratic Leader, United States Senate

Dear Leaders McConnell and Schumer,

The Standing Committee of Correspondents vigorously objects to restrictions being considered on press access during the upcoming Senate trial of President Trump. The Standing Committee sought to address our concerns with the Sergeant at Arms and with the Senate Rules Committee before final decisions were made. But decisions are being made quickly as plans for the trial are completed and we are hearing that nearly every suggestion has been rejected without an explanation of how the restrictions contribute to safety rather than simply limit coverage of the trial.

Capitol Hill is one of the most accessible places in Washington, but the proposed restrictions exceed those put in place during the State of the Union, Inauguration Day or even during the Clinton impeachment trial 20 years ago.

These proposed restrictions include, but are not limited to:

- The placement of a magnetometer at the door of the chamber inside the Senate press gallery to do additional security sweeps of members of the press each time they exit or enter the chamber.
- No electronics allowed within the Senate chamber.
- Pens to hold reporters on the second floor of the building in the Ohio clock corridor prohibiting reporters from freely accessing Senators as they come to and from the chamber.
- A single pool camera with no audio to cover the arrival of the articles of impeachment from the House.
- Restrictions on reporters' ability to walk with senators from the Senate subway to the bank of six elevators.

These potential restrictions fail to acknowledge what currently works on Capitol Hill, or the way the American public expects to be able to follow a vital news event about their government in the digital age.

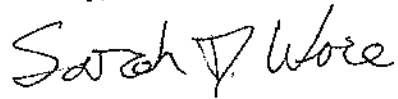
The Committee has consented to an extra credential for people covering the trial, which is intended to help Capitol Police officers quickly identify credentialed reporters.

The Committee requested an exemption to the longstanding Senate rule of no laptops within the chamber. Not allowing laptops to cover the trial puts any reporter trying to do their job as an eyewitness to history at a distinct disadvantage to those who choose to watch it from a desk. Furthermore, using a magnetometer encourages disruption of the proceedings as reporters rush in and out of the chamber to inform the public as news occurs, will take up workspace. There is no additional safety or security

brought by bringing such a device into reporter work space and gives the impression that it is being done mostly to protect Senators from the bright light of the public knowing what they are doing in one of the country's most important moments.

The Senate is about to fulfill its constitutional obligation to consider whether the president should be removed from office. The restrictions being put in place keep reporters from fulfilling their constitutional obligation to inform the public about what elected officials are doing on their behalf.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah D. Wire". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "S".

Sarah D. Wire
Chair, Standing Committee of Correspondents