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# White House says it has the right to punish AP reporters over Gulf naming dispute

The White House says news organizations that refuse to use President Donald Trump’s new name for the Gulf of Mexico are telling “lies.”

ByDAVID BAUDER AP media writer  
February 12, 2025, 6:42 PM

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White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt speaks during a briefing at the White House, Wednesday, Feb. 12, 2025, in Washington. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)  
The Associated Press

NEW YORK -- The White House said Wednesday that news organizations that refuse to use President Donald Trump's new name for the Gulf of Mexico were telling "lies" and insisted it would continue to bar Associated Press journalists from presidential events.

Trump has decreed that the international body of water — which borders Mexico, the United States and other nations — be called the Gulf of America. In its influential Stylebook, the AP said it would [continue to use](#) Gulf of Mexico, while also noting Trump's decision, to ensure that names of geographical features are recognizable around the world.

The White House's outright attempt at regulating language used by independent media — and the punitive measures attached to it — mark a sharp escalation in Trump's often fraught dealings with news organizations.

At a regular briefing Wednesday, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said that "it is a fact that the body of water off the coast of Louisiana is called the Gulf of America, and I'm not sure why news outlets don't want to call it that."

In reality, the body lies partially in waters that don't belong to the United States and has been called the Gulf of Mexico for hundreds of years.

On Tuesday, AP reporters were blocked from attending events in the Oval Office and the White House's Diplomatic Reception Room. While an AP reporter was in the White House briefing room Wednesday for Leavitt's remarks, they were turned away at a later event in the Oval Office for the swearing in of Tulsi Gabbard as national intelligence director.

Julie Pace, AP's senior vice president and executive editor, wrote to White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles on Wednesday objecting to the moves.

"The actions taken by this White House were plainly intended to punish the AP for the content of its speech," Pace wrote. "It is among the most basic tenets of the First Amendment that the government cannot retaliate against the public or the press for what they say."

The White House pointed out that the AP was allowed into its briefing Wednesday but continued to take issue with the style of the gulf's name. "Nobody has the right to go into the Oval Office and ask the president of the United States questions," Leavitt said. "We reserve the right to decide who gets to go into the Oval Office."

Generally, when the press is permitted to cover White House events where space is tight, a small pool of journalists are allowed in. The AP, which transmits news to thousands of clients, has traditionally been a part of that pool in past administrations.

Asked if barring AP reporters was retaliatory, Leavitt said that the Interior Secretary has codified the name change in official documents and that “pretty much every other outlet in this room has recognized that body of water as the Gulf of America.”

The move raised alarms among several advocates for the press. “Barring an AP journalist from covering an Oval Office event because the AP has not adopted President Trump’s change of name to what has long been called the Gulf of Mexico is an affront to the First Amendment,” said noted attorney Floyd Abrams.

A major consortium of news organizations, the Inter American Press Association, [said Wednesday that the White House move](#) was “an act of censorship and intimidation that violates the freedom of the press enshrined in the United States Constitution.”

The president of the IAPA, José Roberto Dutriz, expressed concern about this measure: “Restricting press coverage and warning against the AP demonstrate a troubling intention to impose official criteria on public interest information, with the threat of reprisals for those who do not comply,” said José Roberto Dutriz, CEO and general director of La Prensa Gráfica in El Salvador.

Users of the Google map app in the United States will now see the body of water referred to as the Gulf of America, the company said. Mexican users would see “Gulf of Mexico.” Elsewhere in the world, Google identifies it as “Gulf of Mexico (Gulf of America).”

But the AP’s decision is influential because many news outlets and other organizations use it as an arbiter of how to consistently refer to things.

Some larger outlets have their own rules.

—The New York Times said it would continue to use Gulf of Mexico, while noting Trump’s renaming in stories that discuss that issue. The gulf, which borders Mexico and Cuba as well as the United States, has been known as the Gulf of Mexico for more than 400 years.

—The Washington Post also said it would use Gulf of Mexico in most references because it “is not solely within the United States’ jurisdiction and the name of Gulf of America might confuse global readers.”

—Fox News said that, starting Sunday, it would use Gulf of America in all of its references.

Trump has also ordered that the United States’ tallest mountain revert back to the name Mount McKinley after President Barack Obama changed the Alaska peak to its Indigenous name, Denali. AP says it would follow Trump’s decision because he has the authority to rename areas that are solely within the United States.

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David Bauder writes about media for the AP. Follow him at <http://x.com/dbauder> and <https://bsky.app/profile/dbauder.bsky.social>

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