

Congress of the United States

PRESS GALLERIES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-7238

MEMORANDUM

SENT VIA EMAIL

To: Senate Rules Committee, Office of the Majority Leader, Office of the Minority Leader

From: The Chairs of the Executive Committee of the Radio/TV Gallery and the Standing Committee of Correspondents of the Congressional Daily Press Gallery

Date: July 29, 2026

Subject: Request for Expanded Use of Handheld Electronic Devices & Silent Electronic Tools for Reporting on the Senate Side of the U.S. Capitol

Dear Chairman McConnell,

We respectfully request rule changes to modernize press access on the Senate side of the U.S. Capitol by:

1. Permitting laptops, tablets, and cell phones on silent mode in the Senate Chamber for real-time, unobtrusive reporting.
2. Authorizing handheld electronic devices for filming in clearly defined public and press-accessible areas.

Background

Electronic Device Use in Chambers:

- The House Chamber allows silent laptops and phones, enabling reporters to cover major speeches, votes, and negotiations in real time from the gallery.
- The Senate Chamber prohibits any electronic devices, although senators currently use their own electronic devices on the Senate floor. This requires reporters to take notes by hand and step outside for electronic transmission — resulting in delayed coverage, added noise from reporters frequently entering and exiting the chamber, fewer reporters physically present in the chamber press gallery, and increased risk of transcription errors.

Filming Rules:

- On the House side of the Capitol and in Senate office buildings, handheld filming devices (e.g., smartphones) have long been permitted in select areas.
- On the Senate side of the U.S. Capitol, handheld filming has never been permitted — even in areas where photography and audio recording are already allowed.

This disparity has led to decreased physical press presence in the Senate Chamber and diminished immediate public understanding of critical moments in history. Please see exhibit 1 below for a comparison of relevant and proposed Senate and House press coverage rules.

Proposed Rule Changes

A. Silent Electronic Devices in the Senate Chamber

Authorize the use of laptops, tablets, and cell phones within the Senate Chamber gallery, provided they are:

- In silent mode with no audio or phone calls permitted
- Used solely for notetaking, live reporting, and real-time transcription of proceedings
- Not be used for taking photographs or video
- Managed in a way that does not disrupt Senate business or violate decorum

B. Filming Authorization

Permit members of the Congressional Press Galleries to use handheld electronic devices (e.g. smartphones) for filming in select Senate-side locations, including:

- Ohio Clock corridor
- First floor public spaces of the Senate side
- Senate subway areas (where audio recording is already permissible)

This applies only to small handheld devices — not larger ENG cameras — and maintains the prohibition on filming directed into the Senate Chamber and directly outside its doors.

Rationale

1. **Parity Across Chambers:** Aligns Senate media rules with House practices long proven to support transparency and timely reporting without disruption.
 2. **Modern News Standards:** Silent electronics enable accurate, real-time coverage, reducing transcription errors (from paper handwritten notes) and improving the public record.
 3. **Enhanced Press Presence:** Encourages more reporters to cover Senate proceedings in person, revitalizing press coverage of speeches and major votes in the Chamber.
 4. **Minimal Disruption:** Small handheld filming devices and silent electronics present no material interference with Senate operations or security.
 5. **Public Access & Trust:** Increases immediacy and accuracy of reporting, fostering greater trust in institutional transparency.
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Exhibit 1:

Comparison of House & Senate Press Access Rules

Category	House Chamber / House Side of Capitol	Senate Chamber / Senate Side of Capitol	Proposed Change
Silent Electronic Devices in Chamber (laptops, cell phones, tablets)	Permitted in gallery if on silent mode. No calls, audio or video recording allowed. Enables real-time reporting & accurate transcription during votes, debates, speeches.	Prohibited — reporters must leave devices outside; must use pen/pencil & paper, delaying coverage and risking transcription errors.	Allow silent devices in Senate Chamber for notetaking, transcription, and real-time reporting with no audio, photos, videos or calls permitted
Handheld Filming Devices in Capitol public areas (smartphones, small cameras)	Permitted in designated public spaces including outside Speaker Johnson's office, National Statuary Hall, the 1 st floor corridors, and by the base of the East Front exterior steps.	Prohibited in Senate side of Capitol and by the base of the chamber East Front exterior steps.	Allow handheld filming (not ENG cameras) in defined Senate-side locations such as Ohio Clock corridor, first floor public spaces, and Senate subway areas.
Filming inside Chamber, with cameras directed into the Chamber or at Chamber doors	Prohibited.	Prohibited.	No change — prohibition maintained to protect decorum.
Filming in adjoining corridors	Handheld filming permitted in Statuary Hall and Speaker's Rotunda. Five designated tripod standup locations are also available 24/7 in Will Rogers area.	Prohibited on Senate side despite identical security and decorum considerations.	Permit filming in Ohio Clock, reception room and similar public spaces, with same restrictions as House.
Filming in Office Buildings	Permitted in House office buildings.	Permitted in Senate office buildings.	Already equal; no change needed.

Why This Matters

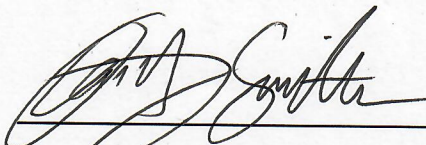
- Creates **rule parity across both chambers** — eliminating an access gap that disadvantages Senate coverage.
- Enhances **accuracy** of reporting by reducing transcription errors and enabling real-time coverage.
- Encourages **stronger press presence** in the Chamber Press Galleries during Senate proceedings, reversing the decline in in-chamber reporting.
- Presents **minimal disruption**, as the precedent in the House shows these policies work smoothly.

Conclusion

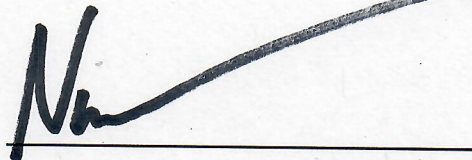
These modest, clearly defined changes will modernize Senate press access, restore parity with the House, and enhance the public's ability to witness and understand Senate proceedings. They balance transparency with decorum, preserve prohibitions on intrusive filming, and strengthen the accuracy of the historical record.

We urge the Senate Rules Committee and Senate Leadership to adopt these reforms and stand ready to collaborate on clear guidelines to ensure smooth implementation.

Respectfully yours,



Orion Donovan Smith
Chair, Standing Committee of Correspondents
Congressional Daily Press Gallery



Nathaniel Reed
Chair, Executive Committee of the
Congressional Radio-Television
Correspondents' Gallery