



White House Correspondent Sues Press Secretary for Discrimination

After months of being ignored for trying to ask the White House press secretary tough questions, being castigated for making those attempts, and then being eliminated from the press room through changes in credentialing requirements that targeted him, [journalist Simon Ateba filed suit on Thursday](#).

The suit named White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre, Secret Service Director Kimberly Cheatle, and the Secret Service itself as defendants.

Ateba is, or was, the White House correspondent for his website *Today News Africa* (TNA), where he reports on Africa-U.S. relations. He is being assisted in his lawsuit by the Center for American Liberty, a nonprofit law firm engaged in defending free speech.

[From the lawsuit:](#)

Regardless of what the questions are, the White House generally ignores them. This refusal to provide information to Mr. Ateba makes it increasingly difficult for Mr. Ateba to obtain the necessary information needed for the quality of coverage he seeks to provide his readers.

The lawsuit is built around defending the First Amendment and its guarantee of a “free press”:

“The press” does not just include a small class of elite journalists, credentialed by one another.

The First Amendment’s guarantees protect the *public’s* right to engage in constitutionally protected press activity.

Indeed, the “inclusion of the words ‘the press’ in the First Amendment does not confer upon [journalists] a title of nobility.” [Emphasis in original.]

Ateba is known for expressing his frustration over being ignored by speaking over other journalists, infuriating them and the secretary. The lawsuit specifically mentions two recent incidents, one in March and another in June, in which Ateba interrupted another journalist by challenging the press secretary over her deliberately ignoring his questions.



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Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on August 11, 2023

Explains the lawsuit:

After months of not receiving answers to his inquiries from the White House press office, Mr. Ateba chose to utilize the only option available to him: speaking up during press briefings.

On several occasions since December 2021, Mr. Ateba asserted himself in the briefing room, speaking over other reporters and the White House Press Secretary in an attempt to make his concerns known....

But the White House has made clear it does not intend to treat Mr. Ateba like his colleagues. Quite [the] opposite: the White House Press Office recently revised its credentialing criteria for a media “hard pass” this past May in a brazen attempt to exclude Mr. Ateba from the White House briefing room.

As of August 1, 2023, over 440 previously credentialed White House reporters no longer have “hard pass” access to the White House media facilities under the new requirements.

While other reporters were affected by the revisions, excluding Mr. Ateba was the primary objective because the White House no longer wanted to deal with him or his questions.

This is how the White House rids itself of troublemakers who wish to ask the hard questions that most in the mainstream media will not ask. As a result, noted the lawsuit, “the entrenched mainstream media have the power to pick and choose which reporters may access ... the White House.”

When the new “credentialing” requirements were issued in May, Ateba initially refused to apply, knowing that he would be turned down. But in June he changed his mind and applied specifically to the Congressional Daily Press Gallery which, not surprisingly, has refused to respond in any way to his request.

This, claims the lawsuit, violates the First Amendment:

The process adopted by the White House—*i.e.*, delegating access to the White House “hard pass” to the other branches of government—is an unconstitutional attempt to arbitrarily restrict who qualifies as “the press.”

Established media outlets control the Congressional Correspondents Committees, which only provide press credentials to reporters who meet the vague standard of being a “reputable journalist.”

Congress gave the committees unbridled discretion to pick and choose which journalists can exercise their constitutional rights at the Capitol. The White House has incorporated this delegation into its own credentialing process—and with it, the same constitutional infirmities.

Defendants do not like Mr. Ateba’s behavior—or his questions—during press briefings. But instead of enforcing a decorum requirement equally across all White House correspondents, Defendants simply re-defined who is allowed in the door in the first place.

And they did so to specifically exclude Mr. Ateba.



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on August 11, 2023

Ateba has also been denied access to the rare press conferences held by Joe Biden himself:

Mr. Ateba has been allowed to attend President Biden's press conferences just once in nearly three years. When he attempts to attend, he is denied access.

For the press conferences he was allowed to attend, he was not allowed to ask a question.

Although Biden isn't named in the lawsuit, the point is made: Dissidents are not allowed access or the freedom to ask hard questions. When the Trump administration canceled access to the press briefings for CNN's Jim Acosta and *Playboy's* Brian Karem, the mainstream press roared its indignation. Now, however, the same media are strangely — but predictably — silent.

In its statement announcing the lawsuit, the Center for American Liberty [said](#):

It is clear that the White House changed its credentialing requirements specifically to exclude Simon, in direct violation of the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of the press.

If the media are going to be truly free to hold the government to account—regardless of who is in the White House—we must stop this Administration's attempt to shut down reporters like Simon.



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