

## 26th ISOJ A Conversation with Julie Pace, Senior VP and Executive Editor, the Associated Press

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  - Chair: Evan Smith, co-founder, The Texas Tribune, and senior advisor, Emerson Collective
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**Summer Harlow** Hey, we are ready to get started again. We have, in yet another wonderful follow-up to the previous panel, we're going to welcome back to the stage Evan Smith, senior advisor for Emerson Collective, who's going to lead us in a very special conversation with Julie Pace, senior vice president and executive editor of the Associated Press.

**Evan Smith** All right, thank you. I'm Evan Smith. I'm a senior advisor at Emerson Collective. I'm the co-founder and former CEO of the Texas Tribune, and I'm so pleased to have Julie Pace in Austin. She is senior vice president and executive editor of the Associated Press, leading the iconic news organization's global coverage from more than 100 countries. Since she assumed that role in 2021, the AP has been awarded three Pulitzer Prizes. Previously, she was Washington bureau chief for the AP, directing its reporting on the presidency, politics, and US government. Before that, she was the AP's White House correspondent. If you're wondering why the head of the AP newsroom was a late add to this program, you are at the wrong conference. A fight over White House access is a fight over free speech, and a fight for free speech is a fight that everyone here has a stake in. We're happy that our sister in arms is with us. Please give a big, big hand to Julie Pace.

So look, I don't ever feel the need to do this on a stage like this, but thank you. First of all, thank you for everything you're doing.

**Julie Pace** Thank you, I appreciate that.

**Evan Smith** What happened yesterday in court? You had a very consequential hearing related to the ongoing troubles. Tell everybody what happened.

**Julie Pace** Sure, so well thank you again for having me today and for having this conversation. So as I'm sure many of you know, we have filed the lawsuit against the government in order to restore our access in the White House. The AP has been a member of the White House press pool for more than 100 years. We've done that through Republican administrations, Democratic administrations and some of the most iconic reporting and images that everyone knows from presidential coverage has come from the AP. We are no longer in the White House pool. We've also been barred from other large events both at the White House and elsewhere. And really, it was a last resort for us to file a lawsuit. That was not a step that we wanted to take, but really it became sort of the option of last resort for us.

So we were back in court yesterday arguing that our First Amendment rights have been violated, also that there was a due process violation here. It was a very substantive hearing. Two of our really terrific journalists, Zeke Miller, who's our chief White House correspondent, Evan Vucci, who's our chief Washington photographer, both testified about

the impact that the band has had on their coverage and their ability to cover this White House in a way that truly reaches people around the country and around the world. The judge did not issue a ruling at the end, but we felt like it was a really substantive hearing. We felt like we were able to make our arguments, and we look forward to hearing what the judge has to say.

**Evan Smith** You have no sense of the timetable for a ruling.

**Julie Pace** We don't, we don't.

**Evan Smith** So, this is really about the Gulf of America?

**Julie Pace** Yes and no. You know, that's where it started, but I really would encourage everybody to think about this as something that is so much bigger. You know this is about.

**Evan Smith** But Julie, that was the catalyst for this.

**Julie Pace** It was the catalyst, it was the catalyst. But again, that was the catalyst, but it was really not just about that language that we are using. It was about whether the government can tell a news organization or anyone what language to use, and if they don't comply, retaliate against them.

**Evan Smith** Yeah, but I'm not diminishing the larger implications of this, and the kind of, you know, the stuff that gets me, as a journalist emotional, you know, as a piece. But this is about the Gulf of America. This is about the fact that the AP would not bend to the will of the president, and call this thing that he insists we call it, it. Right? There was nothing else you did.

**Julie Pace** And I think it's important, yes. There was nothing else that we did. And I think it's important to, you know, explain who the AP is, and why we made that decision. Because we're a global news organization. We operate in 100 countries around the world, and we get requests from governments all the time to use language that they prefer. And we have to make decisions around language that make sense for the broadest audiences possible. That's always the frame that we look at these decisions through is what is the broadness global audience going to understand here? And in this case, the decision which we explained very clearly has been public for many weeks since the beginning of the administration was that we would continue to refer to the Gulf as the Gulf of Mexico, but also acknowledge the President's executive order referring to it as the Gulf of America within the United States. And so we were very transparent about that. We explained the rationale. I should note that many, most major news organizations also use that same style guidance as well.

**Evan Smith** Yeah, and in fact, your style guidance, the AP stylebook, is the style guidance for so many other news organizations. So in some ways, you're really driving the conversation, but in fairness, it is not just you. It is not just you.

So this question of what you can do and what you cannot do, and whether you are hamstrung by this order. I mean, many people who don't like the AP, don't like journalists say, "Oh, so what? They can still cover everything." Zeke Miller, the chief White House correspondent for the AP who you referred to, told the judge yesterday that the AP has been forced to report in a "delayed fashion," in quotes. What does that mean exactly?

**Julie Pace** So we, the first thing I should say is, our commitment to covering the White House has not lessened at all since this started, and our journalists continue to show up every day, show up for pools, they get turned away. They continue to make the case that they should be in the room every day.

**Evan Smith** Every day they show up anyway, even though they know they're going to be turned away.

**Julie Pace** Correct.

**Evan Smith** And every day they're turned away?

**Julie Pace** Correct. But we feel like it's important for us to be there. Because again, this is not about, we look at this not as, is the AP getting in the room? This is, is the AP, which is the representative of thousands of news organizations and four billion people around the world every day who interact with our coverage, we are their representatives in that room. And so we're showing up not for ourselves, we're showing up for them. And so, we feel that's an important thing to continue to do.

**Evan Smith** And you're committed to sending somebody every single day, even though you know you're going to be turned away, simply because you believe it is your right to be there.

**Julie Pace** We believe it is our right to be there, and we believe it is crucial for the public for us to be there.

**Evan Smith** So what is the "delayed coverage" thing?

**Julie Pace** Sure, so when we're in the room, when our own reporter is in the room, we are able to send feeds from that reporter out into the world in real time, we're able to make observations, we are able to not just listen to what the President is saying, we're also able to see who's in the back corner of the room, what the look on people's faces is, advisors, we're looking to see what the foreign delegation is scrambling to do, and we're able to feed that out instantly. Now, when we're not in the room for text, we're having to rely on reports from other news organizations. And some of those reports are very high quality, but they are at a delay for us. And then for photos in particular, we've had to take some, and Evan talked about this in the, Evan Vucci, talked about this in the hearing yesterday. We've had to take some pretty extraordinary steps, like flying a visual journalist from Ukraine over to the United States to be in the Zelensky pool to be in the room to take those photos. But that's not a White House photographer. That was one of our extraordinary visual journalists, Mstyslav Chernov, but he's not a White House photographer. And so it does put us at a disadvantage. I do want to say though, the work that our White House team has done and our entire Washington Bureau has done to maintain strong, aggressive fact-based coverage has been extraordinary.

**Evan Smith** Despite the ban.

**Julie Pace** Despite the ban. It's been extraordinary.

**Evan Smith** And let's be clear, Evan Vucci is not just any photographer. Evan Vucci took the famous photograph of Donald Trump after he was shot, right?

**Julie Pace** He did.

**Evan Smith** He took that fight, fight. Fist up picture.

**Julie Pace** He did, he did. The iconic photo.

**Evan Smith** His point to the, his own statement yesterday in court was we're basically dead in the water on major news stories. That's what he said to the judge.

**Julie Pace** And Evan feels really strongly that yes, we can access other photos, and we have continued to and so we continue to serve our customers, we continue to serve our audiences. I would argue and Evan would certainly argue that I want Evan Vucci in that room.

**Evan Smith** Not somebody else.

**Julie Pace** I want Evan Vucci in that room. I want Alex Brandon, who's one of our other award-winning photographers, our entire White House team. They have made literally a career out of photographing historic moments. And like I said, so many of the iconic moments of the presidency throughout the last several decades have come from the AP. You might not always know that, but they come from the AP.

**Evan Smith** Well, let's acknowledge that. Most people think AP stands for advanced placement. Like, the average person, civilians, people not in our world, don't necessarily have that same interaction with the AP. I mean, one, you'd rather not have this, but one byproduct of this is now the AP is known to a lot more people as a consequence of it, but people are not fully aware of exactly how much the AP provides them. I want to talk about two impacts. One is that this attack on the AP, keeping the AP out, is not just an aggression against the AP. It's a warning shot against all the rest of us. Zeke made this point. He said to the judge that other outlets have begun to tread lightly in their questioning of the president to avoid repercussions. Fall in line, or as your lawyer said yesterday, the AP's lawyer, you end up in the penalty box. That's definitely one of the messages of this, isn't it?

**Julie Pace** I think it is, and I've had that conversation with many of my colleagues at other organizations, which is we may be the target now, but I don't think we'll be the only ones. And that's why it's important for us to stand up for this principle. You know, this is, like I said, this is not something that we relish. Nobody, no news organization, wants to be in court suing the administration. We want to be in the Oval Office covering the administration right now. But we do feel like this is an important principle to stand on. And I think we are uniquely positioned at the AP. I mean, we've made this point. We are not owned by any corporation. We have no shareholders. If we don't stand up for this principle, who will stand up for this? And we feel like we're doing that not just for the AP, we are doing that for all news organizations and really for the public as well.

**Evan Smith** And you made the point in a Wall Street Journal opinion piece earlier this week, you said, "Today the U.S. government wants to control the AP's speech. Tomorrow, it could be somebody else's." So this is essentially the gateway drug to censorship, is effectively what it is.

**Julie Pace** Again, we don't feel like we are being singled out because we're the only ones who will be targeted here.

**Evan Smith** I asked the panel before this, before you got here, if in kind of a great Aaron Sorkin sense, everybody in the White House press corps should have walked on the day that the AP was banned. You ban one of us, you ban all of us. The previous panel said, you know, I mean, they love you, but also they were like, our job is to report on the President. What do you think about that?

**Julie Pace** You know, we didn't call for a boycott. We didn't ask other organizations to take that stand. I think that, you know, our goal here has been trying to maintain independent, non-partisan coverage of the administration. And I think, you know, I'm sure this came up in the previous panel, the White House press corps is an incredibly diverse press corps. That's both in terms of size, and reach, and medium and political.

**Evan Smith** It's ideology, right?

**Julie Pace** Ideology. It's an incredibly diverse press corps. Getting the press corps to agree on anything is quite difficult, and so I think the reality is that was probably unlikely to happen. And our goal is to try to make sure that not just the AP, but everybody who's in that press corps can continue to have access

**Evan Smith** The other impact point, which I thought was, it just, when I heard this, I thought, "Oh, of course, this makes perfect sense," also came to me from your opinion piece, where you referred to a newspaper in Missouri, the Joplin Globe. The person at the Joplin Globe said, denying the AP coverage is effectively denying access to our readers. What we don't think about is that AP coverage runs in newspapers from coast to coast, from border to border, many of them in rural communities that have no reporters to speak up as their news sources, many communities that voted for this administration. And by denying the AP, they're denying news coverage to those communities and to those voters. It sort of didn't occur to me, you said four billion people see your stories every day. What the ban on the AP means is so much more than simply keeping your reporter out of the press corps.

**Julie Pace** It's one of the things that I've always loved about the AP. That one AP story, one AP photo can be everywhere. And it can be in a major national publication in the United States. It can be in a major national publication in Japan. It can be in a small community newspaper in a red state and a small community newspaper in a blue state. And so, when we talk about, at the AP, being non-partisan, it's not a throwaway line for us. Because we put out one news report every single day. One report. It has to be able to run in all of those different places. It has to be viewed as credible, and nonpartisan, and fact-based in all of those different places. And so we take that incredibly seriously. It's core to who we are. And when you take us out of the mix, you take us out of all of these places. You deprive those audiences of a news organization that wakes up every day thinking about, how do I serve that audience? How do I make sure that they get fact-based news in a moment when fact-based news is really hard to come by?

**Evan Smith** I mean, I'm tempted to say that in a week in which the administration was found to be discussing war plans on Signal, the idea that they would do anything ham-handed is not that big a leap. But the ham-handedness of this, to me, is kind of extraordinary because they could have just picked on an organization that was, by its nature, much more partisan or much more anti-Trump. By picking on the AP, you're picking on, literally, the most antiseptic news organization. The issue is not that you're all a bunch of left-wing lunatics, right? That's not the issue.

**Julie Pace** No, and I want to be clear. I mean, we have had a good working relationship with the first Trump administration, the Trump campaigns. We had a good working relationship with this White House going into the start of the presidency. And we are not here to be adversarial. We are not. We don't fancy ourselves as oppositional. Because again, our entire purpose as an organization is to reach people across the political spectrum. That is what we exist to do. It is what we were founded to do, so the idea that we would act in an oppositional way, the idea that we would be sort of in this fight as an adversary is very uncomfortable to us, and again, not the purpose of our organization.

**Evan Smith** Does it seem to you that they expected you would just kind of give up? I mean, they really haven't put up very much of a fight from what I've seen. I mean their case for themselves has effectively acknowledged your argument for why what they've done is wrong.

**Julie Pace** Yeah, I think what's interesting about this situation is that you talked about how this started. I don't think anybody disagrees with how this started, and why we're in this situation. There was an independent editorial decision made by the AP, based on what was best for our news organization. The White House disagrees with that, and they made it very clear to us that unless we changed our policy, we would be banned.

**Evan Smith** But don't you think they thought that what you would do was cave? Everybody else is caving these days. Everybody else is caving. They've discovered that doing the wrong thing or the aggressive thing produces results, but it did not in your case.

**Julie Pace** It didn't, and I can't speak to what they thought we would or wouldn't do, but I can speak to what I know our values are, and what I know our principles are, and that is making sure that we can operate independent of government interference, that we can stand by our decisions and say that there is nothing motivating what we do other than our desire to be independent, and non-partisan, and fact-based. And again, I do think that we are uniquely positioned, certainly as a news organization in this moment to take that stand. But I also think a lot about, you know, if you bend on some of these principles, you're not just doing it for yourself. You know, you're kind of bending for everybody else who comes behind you. And I think it was really vital to us to make sure that, again, we weren't just standing up for our own principles here. We were standing up for the principles of the entire independent press. And again, also for the public, because I think this matter of speech is something that is relevant beyond the media conversation.

**Evan Smith** What's the end game here for you?

**Julie Pace** Well, we hope for a favorable ruling in the court. But I will say, no matter what happens, whatever the outcome of the cases, we are comfortable with the position that we have taken, and we will continue to cover this White House in the ways that we've have throughout our history. Again, fact-based, non-partisan, independent.

**Evan Smith** We have time for just a couple of questions. Joy Mayer of Trusting News has a question for you. Says the AP articulated a solid explanation for the Gulf of America language choice, but most of America did not see that. Would it be helpful for member news outlets to publish similar explanations and link to that from daily stories? Would you ever encourage them to do that?

**Julie Pace** We would love that. We put out our policy publicly right when we made the decision because we knew that it was going to be picked apart. We didn't necessarily think it would end up here, but we knew it was going to be picked apart. So we made that public. And that is actually one of the things we've talked a lot about this year is trying to be more transparent about a lot of the decisions that we make because we think the more we can pull back the curtain on what we do with the AP, I think the more people will see just how fact-based and nonpartisan we are. But yes, certainly we would encourage people to take a look at the policy. It's actually quite nuanced, and I think quite strong.

**Evan Smith** So speaking of nuance and speaking of pulling back the curtain, similar question, Santiago Lion, can more be done by the AP and other outlets to help explain how their news agencies, like the AP, play into the broader news ecosystem, particularly supplying your customers? This is the point we were talking about. The nuances are likely lost on most members of the public. Back to this idea that most civilians don't fully appreciate the scope and depth and breadth of the AP's reach. Can you do more to talk about that?

**Julie Pace** Sure, well, and one of the things we've been really encouraged by is that a lot of our members you referenced Joplin from the journal op-ed, we've had many, many members who have published on their own op-eds in their outlets talking about their relationship with the AP, and that has really just been an expansive group again from red states, and blue states, small publications, large publications But we've been really encouraged that people have been touting their association with the AP. We really want to make sure that you know it is clear who we are and what we do, and again I think that that has been one of the bright spots in what has otherwise been a pretty, you know, difficult moment for us

**Evan Smith** We've got to stop. I know that everybody in the room joins me in saying thank you for fighting. Keep fighting. Julie Pace, thank you very much.