

White House Grants Press Credentials to a Pro-Trump Blog

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The Gateway Pundit, a provocative conservative blog, gained notice last year for its fervent pro-Trump coverage and its penchant for promoting false rumors about voter fraud and Hillary Clinton's health that rocketed around right-wing websites.

Now the site will report on politics from a prominent perch: the White House.

The Trump administration has granted press credentials to Lucian B. Wintrich, the Washington correspondent for Gateway Pundit, to attend White House press briefings and ask questions of the press secretary, Sean M. Spicer.

Mr. Wintrich, an artist and writer who has collaborated with Milo Yiannopoulos, the polarizing editor at Breitbart News, attended President Trump's news conference with the Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, on Monday. He was joined by the owner of Gateway Pundit, Jim Hoft, who posted on Twitter, "President Trump just spoke about tossing criminal migrants and I wanted to stand up and cheer!!"

In a telephone interview from the West Wing, Mr. Wintrich, 28, said he would "be reporting far more fairly than a lot of the very left-wing outlets that are currently occupying the briefing room." He added, "We will be doing a little trolling of the media in general here."

Asked what kind of trolling his fellow White House correspondents might want to prepare for, Mr. Wintrich paused. "I don't want to give too much away," he said. "We have some pretty solid stuff planned."

Bloggers and pundits have been granted access to White House briefings in previous administrations, and Mr. Spicer in recent weeks has taken questions from conservative talk-radio hosts and reporters at local broadcast affiliates. But the inclusion of Gateway Pundit has raised concerns that the Trump administration, which has called the news media "the opposition party," is favoring outlets more sympathetic to its views.

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On Monday, some journalists complained after Mr. Trump took questions at his news conference only from a local broadcast journalist and a reporter from The Daily Caller, a conservative news site. Neither reporter asked about one of the day's top stories, the status of Mr. Trump's national security adviser, Michael T. Flynn.

Several inquiries to the White House were not returned on Monday.

Gateway Pundit has been cited by the Fox News anchor Sean Hannity, The Drudge Report, Sarah Palin and other popular conservative personalities and outlets. Last month, the site drew criticism for disseminating a false report that a Washington Post journalist had photographed the written notes of Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson during a confirmation hearing. The journalist, who did not attend the hearing, was subsequently harassed with threatening voice mail messages and online attacks.

When asked about the false stories, Mr. Wintrich said: "That is the state of new media. When you are trying to get new information out there as quickly as possible, occasionally you'll get something wrong and have to fix it. That's how media works right now." He said that Gateway Pundit had "broken dozens and dozens more factual stories" but did not offer an example when asked for one.

Mr. Wintrich described himself as a Trump supporter and Goldwater conservative who enjoys "simultaneously trolling both progressives and evangelical conservatives." He said his aim was "to provide fair coverage from the conservative side."

On Twitter on Monday, Mr. Wintrich posted a photograph of himself standing behind the White House press room lectern, a White House pass slung around his neck. The post from Mr. Hoft included the hashtag #pepe and an accompanying Pepe emoji, a reference to Pepe the Frog, a cartoon character that has been repurposed as a symbol by white supremacy and anti-Semitic groups.

Mr. Wintrich said the inclusion of the Pepe icon was not meant as anti-Semitic. “My grandfather is Jewish, he fought against the Germans, escaped through the Polish underground,” Mr. Wintrich said.

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