Blogging Congress: Technological Change and the Politics of the Congressional Press Galleries

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New media historically have had difficulty obtaining access to the U. S. Congress. As technological changes have shifted the competitive balance among news organizations, the more established media have traditionally fought back by attempting to exclude the upstarts from the corridors of power. For example, Associate Senate Historian Donald Ritchie (1991) recounts the struggle by radio to gain a foothold against the opposition of entrenched newspapers in the 1920s and 1930s. The newspaper-controlled Standing Committee of Correspondents, which was responsible for granting credentials to the Capitol Hill Press Gallery, refused to credential radio reporters unless they also worked for newspapers. The dispute was finally settled in 1939 when Congress created a separate Radio Gallery, making Congress "the only national legislature to divide its galleries among different forms of media" (Ritchie 1991, 217).

When the first Internet reporters showed up on Capitol Hill in the mid-1990s, they did not receive a much better reception in the press galleries. In 1996, Vigdor Schreibman, a formerly credentialed journalist, lost his Hill credentials after he began writing exclusively for the online Federal Information New Syndicate (FINS) that he founded. FINS would have been the first Internet-only publication to hold Hill credentials, but the Periodical Press Gallery withheld them because Schreibman no longer worked as a full-time journalist who earned a living from journalism (Obey 1996). Although Schreibman lost his battle, the galleries adopted an informal policy in 1996 of credentialing some Internet-only publications, such as HearingRoom.com (Ritchie 2005, 288–9). The rules were not formally adjusted to clarify the participation of online publications until 2003, shortly after the galleries had been pressured to admit WorldNetDaily in 2002 (Pershing 2003).

The Internet is not the only technological change affecting journalists on Capitol Hill, but it is at the center of a firestorm brought about by the advance of digital technology. Cell phones, BlackBerries, wireless microphones, digital cameras, and light, hand-held video cameras have radically revised how journalists work. These advances have fundamentally altered the equilibrium in the galleries among competing media. The political responses to this disruption have been driven by efforts to incorporate new demands from the media while simultaneously protecting the institutional prerogatives of Congress, the standards of the journalism profession, and the freedom of the press under the First Amendment. This article explores these politics by explaining the governance of the galleries, highlighting the current controversies they face, and discussing the outlook for the future.

Governance

When the Senate established the first "Reporter's Gallery" in 1841 (the House followed suit in 1857), newspapers were the principal form of mass media (Ritchie 1991, 26). As the forms of media evolved, so did the galleries. Today there are four types of media galleries on Capitol Hill: (1) the Daily Press Gallery; (2) the Periodical Press Gallery; (3) the Radio-Television Gallery; and (4) the Press Photographers' Gallery. Each type of gallery exists both in the House and the Senate, making eight galleries in total. About 5,000 people currently hold press passes to one of the galleries (Ritchie 2007).[1]

Journalists may gain membership in the galleries by applying to the peer supervisory committee of the particular type of gallery to which they seek admittance. There are four nonpartisan supervisory committees—one for each type of gallery—with each committee overseeing its members in both chambers. The House and Senate Daily Press Galleries are supervised by a five-member "Standing Committee of Correspondents" (House Press Gallery 2008). The House and Senate Periodical Galleries, as well as the Radio-Television Galleries, are under the jurisdiction of seven-member Executive Committees (Senate Radio-Television Gallery 2008; House Periodical Press Gallery 2008). The Press Photographers' Galleries are governed by a six-member Standing Committee of Press Photographers (Senate Press Photographers' Gallery 2008). Members of the standing/executive committees are elected by the members of their respective galleries to serve two-year terms. The principal role of these committees is to interpret and administer House and Senate rules (Rule 6 in the House and Rule 33 in Senate), subject to the approval of the Speaker of the House and the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration (Senate Periodical Press Gallery 2008). These committees have jurisdiction over the operation of journalists anywhere on the Capitol grounds, including the House and Senate chambers, the entire Capitol building, hearing rooms, and the ancillary congressional office buildings.[2]

The standing/executive committees are challenged to craft a delicate balance among three competing considerations. First, the committees endeavor to protect the institutional prerogatives of Congress. They recognize that what Congress has given, Congress can take away, since the Constitution grants each house the right to make its own rules in Article I, Section 5. Access to premium workspace above the House and Senate chambers is a privilege, so the committees are loath to endanger the goodwill of their hosts. Second, the committees aspire to maintain the standards of the journalism profession. They grant credentials only to bone fide journalists who work for reputable publications and whom are not lobbyists or affiliated with any advocacy organization. Third, the committees are charged with maintaining a viable freedom of the press. While this mission may sound excessively abstract, it becomes a concrete task in the regular workings of the standing/executive committees. The fact that members

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of the press galleries are chosen by their peers (rather than by Congress itself) is a critical check to prevent Congress from interfering with the people who cover it. Andrew Taylor, the 2008 Chairman of the Standing Committee of Correspondents for the Daily Press Gallery explains that although this system is "old fashioned," preserving noninterference "is not just symbolically important, it is substantively important, which is why we guard it so zealously" (Taylor 2008).

The standing/executive committees deal with matters of policy, but do not administer the galleries on a day-to-day basis. Instead, they are assisted by a paid, nonpartisan staff, whom they appoint with the blessing of the Speaker of the House and the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration (Senate Daily Press Gallery 2008). Each gallery is run by a director (or a superintendent, in the case of the House Press Gallery) and employs up to six paid staff members. The staff provides workspace to credentialed members of the gallery and facilitates reporters' coverage of formal events and informal happenings on the Hill. It is well positioned to resolve problems when they arise and serves as liaison among the galleries and with key officers of the House and Senate, such as the sergeants-at-arms.

Each of the six officials that I interviewed for this article concur that the galleries are governed amicably and efficiently through cooperation between the staff and the standing/executive committees.[3] At the same time, the current governance structure institutionalizes certain conflicts within the press corps. Different forms of media are inherently pit against one another as the galleries develop their own peculiar interests and needs. New forms of media are implicitly shunned, especially if there is ambiguity as to which gallery they appropriately belong. These conflicts no doubt may be overcome through dialogue and cooperation, but the existing governance structure directly complicates the absorption of significant technological change. In the next section I discuss how this dynamic is unfolding in technologically-driven controversies in the galleries.

Current Controversies

The rise of the Internet and concomitant improvements in digital technology have stirred up several disputes in the galleries, three of which I examine here. First, recent technological changes have sparked a fresh debate on who is a legitimate journalist worthy of credentials on Capitol Hill. Second, the growing demand for multimedia formats has blurred the boundaries among the galleries, stimulating clashes among types of media and members of Congress. Third, the totality of technological change has engendered criticism of the overall organization of the galleries, stimulating alternative proposals for modernization. In this section I discuss how these controversies are being addressed within the institutional structure governing the press galleries.

Disputed Credentials

One of the main concerns of the standing/executive committees of the galleries is to guard the integrity of the journalism profession. Donald Ritchie explains that, to this end, "they try to keep out lobbyists, advocates, amateurs, and other people who muddy the waters" (Ritchie 2008). The problem is that the Internet has blurred the boundaries between journalists and non-journalists. Jamie Dupree, a member of the Executive Committee of the Radio-Television Gallery, notes that "it is a lot easier to be a quote-unquote 'journalist' now because you just get a blog and you start writing, right?" (Dupree 2008). A careful balance must be struck between embracing the expansion of journalism and lowering standards until "every 14-year-old with a modem could apply for a press pass" (Ritchie 2008).

As discussed at the beginning of this article, the press galleries have made strides toward credentialing Internet press in recent years. For example, *Slate* and *The Huffington Post* currently hold credentials. MySpace recently submitted an application, which was pending at the time of the writing of this article (Kornacki 2008). The galleries require that online correspondents receive a substantial portion of their income from journalism, that their publications earn revenue from advertising, subscriptions, or sales, and that those receiving credentials be uninvolved in lobbying or advocacy. The standing/executive committees also try to reserve credentials to those news organizations that have a continued presence in the galleries. When reviewing an application for credentials, Jamie Dupree asks, "Are they going to be there every day? Or are they just trying to get a foot in the door? . . . We don't want them to be getting the credential 'just because'" (Dupree 2008).

The criteria for online journalism nonetheless remain controversial. One problem is that Internet-based publications are more likely than other applicants to be affiliated with advocacy or lobbying organizations. Jamie Dupree recalls that in reviewing online materials associated with one application, an article he was reading concluded with unambiguous advocacy: "Make sure that you write your Congressman and tell him to vote against HR [House Resolution] whatever" (Dupree 2008). The need to exclude advocates does not only arise with on-line media; it has led to the exclusion of organizations such as *Consumer Reports*, due its affiliation with the advocacy organization Consumers Union (Lewis 2007). Yet it appears that this concern is presently more prevalent in cases of online media than in other applications for credentials.

Blogging is unquestionably the hottest new trend in journalism, as all forms of media are rapidly incorporating blogs into their preexisting formats (Heyboer 2003; Hull 2007). The journalistic integrity of blogs is often questioned due to the fact that they usually lack editorial supervision (Hull 2007). Yet bloggers that are affiliated with established news organizations are reasonably likely to be credentialed by the galleries under the status quo, while independent bloggers are almost certain to be excluded (due to their inability to meet the income-from-journalism requirement).

The galleries could take a more inclusive view of blogs. However, given the ubiquity of blogging, it is difficult to see how they might do so while keeping the numbers at a reasonable level and retaining a nonideological standard of evaluation. A glimpse at this dilemma can be gained by looking at the decision process that the Democratic and Republican parties are using to credential bloggers at the upcoming 2008 national conventions. Both parties open the convention press galleries to bloggers who do not meet an income-from-journalism threshold. For example, the Democratic National Convention Committee only requires credentialed blogs to have a minimum of 120 politically related posts, though aspirants must demonstrate the circulation and "influence" of the blog (Democratic National Convention Committee 2008). The committee at the Republican National Convention has explicitly indicated a preference for "conservative" bloggers in its "Internet Alley" (McIntee 2007). Thus, while there is an expanded recognition of blogs as a legitimate form of media, it is still unclear as to how to credential them in a way that embraces the "independent" nature of the phenomenon (i.e., including blogs that are not affiliated with larger media organizations) and retains traditional journalistic standards of nonpartisanship.

Multimedia Journalism

One of the major consequences of the joint rise of the Internet and improved digital technology has been the dramatic

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expansion of multimedia journalism (Layton 2007). The Web has become a platform to present news stories, pictures, radio broadcasts, videos, and interactive media side by side. Television and radio commentators direct viewers and listeners to their Web sites. Print journalists shoot videos to accompany their stories. Photographers write short stories to accompany their pictures. Almost everyone is pressured to write a blog.

The implication of multimedia is that journalists are forced to multitask. Not only do reporters now contribute to more than one form of media, but they work more independently within each form. Linda Kenyon, a member of the Executive Committee of the Radio-Television Gallery, explains that:

> Industry wide, a lot of reporters who used to have one job now have many jobs. For instance, in radio, there was a time when an anchor used to have an engineer working with them. Now anchors do all that work themselves. Typically, reporters will often be their own producers. In television, a reporter may be asked to carry a camera from time to time.
>
> (Kenyon 2008)

Olga Ramirez Kornacki, director of the House Radio-Television Correspondents' Gallery, speculates that part of this trend is due to the economic pressures faced by the parent media companies:

> I think the larger parent companies—the ones who have to deal with the bottom line—are looking at their employees and saying how can we best utilize everything that they have to offer as reporters? And they come up with a plan: OK, we're going to have this print reporter carry a video camera and do something for our interactive Web site. And I don't think that the parent companies realize how much they have increased the workload of their journalists. (Kornacki 2008)

The rise of multimedia is anathema to a gallery system that evolved to manage media discretely by type. The principal challenge to the galleries comes when journalists credentialed in one gallery use the media employed by another gallery. The wielding of small, hand-held video cameras by print journalists and still photographers, ostensibly for Web content, has been particularly controversial. Under the status quo, still photographers and videographers have different access rules. The locations of television cameras are limited largely because it is difficult to move large cameras around safely in crowded environments. Still photographers and print journalists have a wider reign over the geography of the Capitol. However, when still photographers and print journalists carry small video cameras into areas that are off limits to members of the Radio-Television Gallery, allegations of unfairness arise (Kucinich 2006; Newmyer 2006).

The galleries have not adopted a formal policy on hand-held video cameras, but are muddling through informally on a case-by-case basis. Jeffrey Kent, director of the Senate Press Photographers' Gallery, explained that someone who is primarily a still photographer or a print journalist should usually be credentialed in their respective primary gallery (Kent 2008). However, these reporters are still expected to follow the detailed rules of the Radio-Television Gallery, which are unfamiliar to many other journalists. Jamie Dupree laments that "there are natural conflicts between the galleries where they don't enforce the [Radio-Television Gallery's] rules. If one of the people from another gallery runs afoul of the rules, then we hear about it in the Radio-TV Gallery" (Dupree 2008).

The presence of hand-held video cameras may also be problematic if they catch lawmakers by surprise. Jamie Dupree speculates that "the proliferation of small cameras is actually going to create a number of clashes between the media and lawmakers in the future because they are so easily hidden" (Dupree 2008). The same is true of wireless microphones. Violations of coverage rules risk sparking backlash from Congress because members do not want to see television cameras prowling the Capitol building, especially not on the second floor around the chambers (Dupree 2008). Under the present system, even tourists have more rights than journalists. Olga Ramirez Kornacki notes the irony that "a tourist can go anywhere in the Capitol with a video camera. But if you slap a press credential on, and you carry a video camera, then you are automatically stopped from shooting in certain areas" (Kornacki 2008).

Multimedia and the Internet further upset the established order in the galleries by challenging the power dynamics among contending news organizations. For example, the Internet allows more organizations to send pictures to their points of distribution quickly, as many organizations demand a constant influx of content to their Web sites. Jeffrey Kent observes that the Internet

> has evened the playing field for a lot of organizations . . . Should we still use the preference of the old way, where the major three wire services—AP, AFP, and Reuters—are the most dominant news forces? Or, should more preference be given to people like Getty, the *New York Times* News Service, the *McClatchy-Tribune* News Service, or the European Pressphoto news service, who are out there and trying to service their clients just as fast? (Kent 2008)

Thus, the demand for multimedia through the Internet is calling into question relationships between lawmakers and the press, among the galleries, and among competing new organizations. It may take the galleries several years to reconcile the advances brought about by technology with the norms and expectations of the Capitol.

Reorganizing the Galleries

Numerous observers have argued that recent technological changes call for a restructuring of the gallery system. Robert Bluey, director of the Center for Media and Public Policy at the Heritage Foundation, proposes the creation of a press gallery exclusively for online journalists. Bluey sees a new gallery as a route to transparency in government that would allow bloggers to bypass the hurdle of "distrust among the Capitol Hill press corps" (Bluey 2007). The gallery would also serve the interests of members of Congress who recognize blogs as a new way of reaching out to their constituents

On the other end of the continuum, Olga Ramirez Kornacki proposes the consolidation of the galleries into one super-gallery. She prognosticates that "we are seeing a convergence of the media and will eventually, I believe, come down to just one press gallery, through I don't believe that my colleagues are quite on board with this just yet. It doesn't make sense anymore to have four separate press galleries when you currently have reporters using multiple forms of media."

Both proposals face institutional and logistical barriers. Adding an online gallery would require physical space that does not exist in the Capitol building. The addition of the new Capitol Visitor Center may be an opportunity to create

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room for bloggers, though the established media have already staked their claims to the available real estate. The consolidation of the galleries, too, could pose institutional threats. Streamlining could lead to the reduction of gallery staff and resources, which would be disadvantageous both from the point of view of the staff themselves and the media. Combing the galleries would likely rearrange the status ordering of organizations, as some of those that held secure positions on the standing/executive committees under the multiple-gallery system might no longer be electorally viable after unification. As a result, the consensus among the officials I interviewed was that any proposal for reorganization would likely meet considerable resistance from the entrenched interests in the galleries.

Outlook for the Future

Advances in digital technology and Internet communications are revolutionizing journalism and American politics writ large. The parameters of this brave new world are most evident in the coverage of the 2008 presidential campaign, where newcomers like *Politico* and Facebook have earned a seat alongside venerable outlets such as CNN, ABC News, and the *New York Times* (Stelter 2007). The allure of tools such as Facebook is particularly strong because they are designed to facilitate easy (if selective) elite-mass interaction. While Congress has not caught the Facebook fever as severely as the current crop of presidential candidates, the demonstrated efficacy of myriad digital and Internet technologies—YouTube, MySpace, Blogger—will be not long unnoticed by Congress. The day may not be far off when every member of Congress writes a blog, trolls for friends on Facebook, and supplies YouTube links on his or her Web page. With new innovations appearing in cyberspace continuously, even this prediction may sound antiquated in a few months.

The broad techno-political context that engulfs Congress is relevant to the future of the press galleries because, ultimately, the galleries are institutional creatures of Congress. We are wise to remember David Mayhew's (1974) maxim that members of Congress are "single-minded seekers of reelection." Members of Congress will eventually demand that the galleries evolve to serve the political purposes of the members. If blogs and online social networking tools become central to constituent communications, election campaigns, and policy discourse, then they must also become central to the operation of the press galleries. Whether this adjustment will likely take the form of an online media gallery, a super-gallery, or incremental adaptation by the current galleries is unclear as of this writing. What is clear is that the press galleries have only begun their transformation in response to recent technological advances.

Some insight on the future of the galleries might be gleaned from the upcoming 2008 presidential nominating conventions. Two sets of press galleries will be in operation there. One set of galleries will be administered entirely by the staff of the congressional press galleries and will adhere to standards comparable to those that prevail in the Capitol building. A second set of special galleries will be administered by the parties themselves and will be generally open to emerging media. A systematic comparison of these two sets of galleries both within and between the conventions would help to illuminate the ways in which the current structure of the congressional press galleries is adequate and inadequate. Will the overwhelming majority of news be generated through the congressionally administered galleries or will the special galleries serve as a platform for significant but otherwise neglected stories? What will be the substantive differences in the content generated by the two sets of galleries? Will the special galleries operate very differently between the two conventions (suggesting a strong hand by the parties) or will their operation be more uniform (suggesting the emergence of a new professional forum for communication)? What will be the differences between the galleries in the demographics, style, and political orientations of their corps? How common is the presence of individuals affiliated with advocacy organizations in the special galleries? A carefully done study along these lines would have the potential to shed significant light on the dynamic feedback between Congress and the press.

In conclusion, political scientists would be well served by paying closer attention to the press galleries and how they intermediate the relationships among the Congress, the press, the parties, and the public. Donald Ritchie's (1991; 2005; see also Biggs 1996) outstanding historical volumes notwithstanding, relatively little scholarly attention has been devoted to unpacking the logic and dynamics of this institution. Greater insight could be gleaned about Congress in general by conceiving of it as a complex system of multiple, intersecting institutions that include the less-examined congressional offices (e.g., the Congressional Budget Office, the Congressional Research Service, the Office of Public Records, the Press Galleries), than by focusing exclusively on the customary trifecta of the members, the committees, and the leadership.

Notes

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1. All of these journalists are never in the press galleries at once, since there are only about 90 seats in the galleries (Ritchie 2007). Most correspondents use the galleries only on a periodic basis. A very small number of regular reporters are there on an almost daily basis.

2. Journalists must have gallery-issued press passes to passes to work in the Capitol building. The passes are not strictly required in congressional office buildings, though they are beneficial during hearings and in assuring noninterference from the Capitol police.

3. I interviewed three members of the standing/executive committees, a gallery staff member from the House, a gallery staff member from the Senate, and a staff member from the Senate Historical Office.

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Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Yale and APSA Congressional Fellow in Inaugural 1953–54 Class H. Bradford Westerfield Dies at 79

Jeffrey Biggs, *Director, Congressional Fellowship Program*

On January 19, 2008, long-time APSA member and Damon Wells Professor Emeritus of political science at Yale University H. (Holt) Bradford Westerfield died from complications of Parkinson's disease in Watch Hill, Rhode Island. He was 79. Douglas Martin's obituary in the January 27 issue of The New York Times provided a full account of his illustrious career, the details of which do not need to be repeated here. The APSA archives would not, however, have included the fact that over four decades of teaching at Yale, from 1957 when he joined the faculty as an assistant professor of international relations until his retirement in 2001, Professor Westerfield's largely undergraduate classes attracted some 10,000 students. Those classes included President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Senators John Kerry and Joseph I. Lieberman, and other public officials who ". . . cited his influence in framing their approach to public policy. Mr. Cheney repeatedly said Dr. Westerfield helped shape his hard-line approach to foreign policy. But an article in The Nation in 2004," noted Martin, "reported that Dr. Westerfield came to regret the hard-nosed lessons Mr. Cheney said he had learned. Dr. Westerfield explained that his own politics had become much more dovish since."

Martin's obituary did note the Professor Westerfield "spent a year studying Congress as a fellow of the American Political Science Association." That formative experience deserves more elaboration. H. Bradford Westerfield was a member of the APSA Congressional Fellowship's inaugural 1953–54 class that included six political scientists and one journalist. He arrived as a 25-year-old instructor at Harvard University who was deeply interested in foreign affairs. At the time, the fellowship divided the congressional working experience between a committee staff and a personal staff. Westerfield served on the personal staff of Rep. Brooks Hays of Arkansas and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which resulted in a predictable contrast.

According to a 1954 Washington Post article ("Hill 'Interns' Find It's a Busy Grind" by Abbie and Raymond J. Blair), "he got a big dose of Congress as an informational 'mail-order' house. 'Why, during November alone,' he said, 'we were averaging 500 separate requests per day for a single committee report. In fact, most of the people in and around Congress are spending most of their working hours informing citizens in thousands of ways about thousands of things.'" "On a committee staff," Westerfield was quoted, "you work in a single area. You need that to contrast with the work with a Congressman where you're doing everything at once. It points up again," he said, "what different kinds of work you can be doing and still be working for Congress."

The first class of APSA Congressional Fellows came away with one predominating feeling: "The American Government, they're convinced, really is responsive to the individual. Even in this day of H-bombs and crises in Indochina, congressmen are brought back continually to the day-to-day needs of their constituents, when they get letters like this one that came in not long ago: 'Now it's time Congress stopped worrying about hydrogen bombs and got down to solving some of our really serious problems. Like, when are you going to pass a law to do something about poison ivy and ragweed?'"

A May 10, 1953, Washington Post article ("Congressional Interns") noted that the group could serve "a national purpose of much wider scope than their own enlightenment . . . if they go into teaching, law or politics, their knowledge of how Congress operates will probably be widely diffused and thus add to public education on a subject of great importance to the success of our form of government." Professor Westerfield's long career in political science was a magnificent case in point.

He was a descendant of William Bradford, second governor of Plymouth Colony, and was born on March 7, 1928, in Rome, Italy, where his father, Ray Bert Westerfield, an economics professor at Yale, was on sabbatical. In addition to his wife, the former Carolyn Elizabeth Hess, and his son, Leland, Professor Westerfield is survived by his daughter, Pamela Westerfield Bingham, of Manhattan; his brother, Putney, of Hillsborough, California, and four granddaughters.

Please see the In Memoriam section on page 413 for another tribute to Dr. Westerfield's scholary work by friend and colleage Bruce Russett.

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