



## THE NEW WASHINGTON PRESS CORPS: As Mainstream Media Decline, Niche and Foreign Outlets Grow

**UPDATED: July 16, 2009<sup>1</sup>**

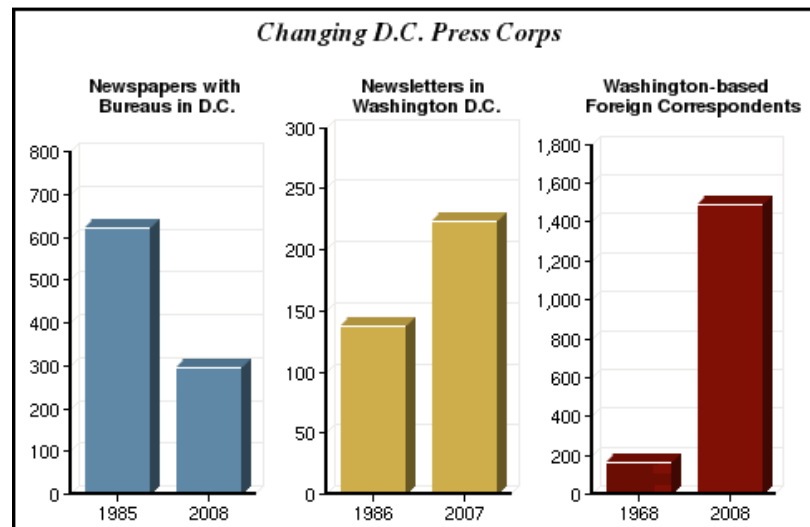
Read the headlines and it would be easy to conclude that as the new Obama Administration takes power, facing an array of domestic and international crises, it will be monitored by a substantially depleted Washington press corps.

It isn't exactly so.

The corps of journalists covering Washington D.C. at the dawn of the Obama Administration is not so much smaller as it is dramatically transformed. And that transformation will markedly alter what Americans know and not know about the new government, as well as who will know it and who will not.

A careful accounting of the numbers, plus detailed interviews with journalists, lawmakers, press association executives and government officials, reveals that what we once thought of as the mainstream news media serving a general public has indeed shrunk—perhaps far more than many would imagine. A roll call of the numbers may shock.

But as the mainstream media have shrunk, a new sector of niche media has grown in its place, offering more specialized and detailed information than the general media to smaller, elite audiences, often built around narrowly targeted financial, lobbying and



<sup>1</sup> The updated material relates to the numbers of reporters and news organizations accredited to the Senate Press Gallery, figures referenced in the first bullet of the report and in the section entitled The Numbers.

political interests. Some of these niche outlets are financed by an economic model of high-priced subscriptions, others by image advertising from big companies like defense contractors, oil companies, and mobile phone alliances trying to influence policy makers.

In addition, the contingent of foreign reporters in Washington has grown to nearly ten times the size it was a generation ago. And the picture they are sending abroad of the country is a far different one than the world received when the information came mainly via American based wire services and cable news.

Consider a few examples:

ClimateWire, an on-line newsletter launched less than a year ago to cover the climate policy debate for a small, high-end audience, deploys more than twice the reporting power around Capitol Hill than the Hearst News Service, which provides Washington news for the chain's 16 daily newspapers.

The Washington bureau of Mother Jones, a San Francisco-based, left-leaning non-profit magazine, which had no reporters permanently assigned to the nation's capital a decade ago, today has seven, about the same size as the now-reduced Time magazine bureau.<sup>2</sup> The Washington bureau of the Arab satellite channel Al Jazeera, which opened a modest bureau when George W. Bush took office eight years ago, now has 105 staff members in its various services accredited to cover Congress,<sup>3</sup> similar in size to that of CBS News—both radio and television—at 129.

Or consider that the organization with the largest number of journalists accredited to the press galleries Congress is CQ, a news operation that produces an array of on-line and print publications with names like CQ Budget Tracker and CQ Senate Watch. Its 149 reporters eclipse the number of Hill-accredited journalists at the Associated Press (134) and congressional staffers dealing with accreditation say CQ has since surpassed even the hometown Washington Post in numbers. A decade ago, CQ had 40.

Collectively, the implications of these changes are considerable. For those who participate in the American democracy, the “balance of information” has been tilted away from voters along Main Streets thousands of miles away to issue-based groups that jostle for influence daily in the corridors of power.

In 2008, newspapers from only 23 states had reporters based in Washington covering federal government, according to the listings of Hudson's Washington News Media Contacts Directory. That is down by a third from 35 states listed in the directory's 1985 edition—and that was before a host of further cutbacks late in 2008.

As New York Times Washington Bureau Chief Dean Baquet put it, “It concentrates knowledge in the hands of those who want to influence votes. It means [for example] the

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<sup>2</sup> As of January 2009, Time had eight in its Washington bureau, down from more than 30 in the mid-1980s.

<sup>3</sup> This means accredited to cover the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, whose term concluded at the end of 2008.

lobbyist knows more about Senator [Richard] Shelby than the people of Alabama. That's not good for democracy."

These are the conclusions of a three-month study conducted by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism and journalist Tyler Marshall on the scale, scope and nature of the Washington press corps at the beginning of the new administration. Marshall conducted the research and reporting. The report was written by the Project and Marshall jointly.

Among the findings:

- **A significant decline in the reporting power of mainstream media.** The poster child of this trend is the daily newspaper, historically the backbone of American journalism, whose robust Washington presence and aggressive reporting has uncovered scandals that toppled a president, sent members of Congress to jail and does the daily job of covering congressional delegations and federal agencies. *From the mid 1980s to 2008, the number of newspapers with bureaus in Washington, according to Hudson's Washington Directories, has fallen by more than half. In the last decade (1997 – 2009, with numbers updated to include the 2009-2010 session), the number of newspaper reporters accredited to cover Congress in particular has fallen by 30%, according to Congressional Directors.*
- **The decline in mainstream press has been nearly matched by a sharp growth among more narrowly focused special interest or niche media.** *The number of specialty newspapers, magazines and newsletters has risen by half since the mid-1980s. Newsletters alone are up nearly two thirds. And from 1997 – 2009, the number of staff from these outlets accredited to cover Congress, a count of Congressional Directories shows, grew by nearly 50%.*
- **A marked jump in foreign media now represented in Washington.** *When the U.S. State Department first opened a Foreign Press Center for representatives of non-U.S. media in 1968, there were about 160 foreign correspondents reporting from Washington. In October, 2008, there were nearly ten times as many. With some notable exceptions, this growth has been more a broadening than a deepening of coverage to international audiences. Foreign journalists tend to fare poorly in the fight for access to key federal government decision-makers and consequently, they break few important stories. Still, their presence in such large numbers has changed the way the world gets its news from Washington, and the implications of their presence for America's image in the world are considerable.*

The shift from media aimed at a general public toward one serving more specialized and elite interests also comes as important parts of the federal government—most notably arms of the executive branch—have become more circumspect, more secretive, and more combative in their dealings with the media. As a result, the traditional—and natural—adversarial relationship between the media and the federal government has hardened perceptibly at a time when the mainstream Washington-based media has weakened.

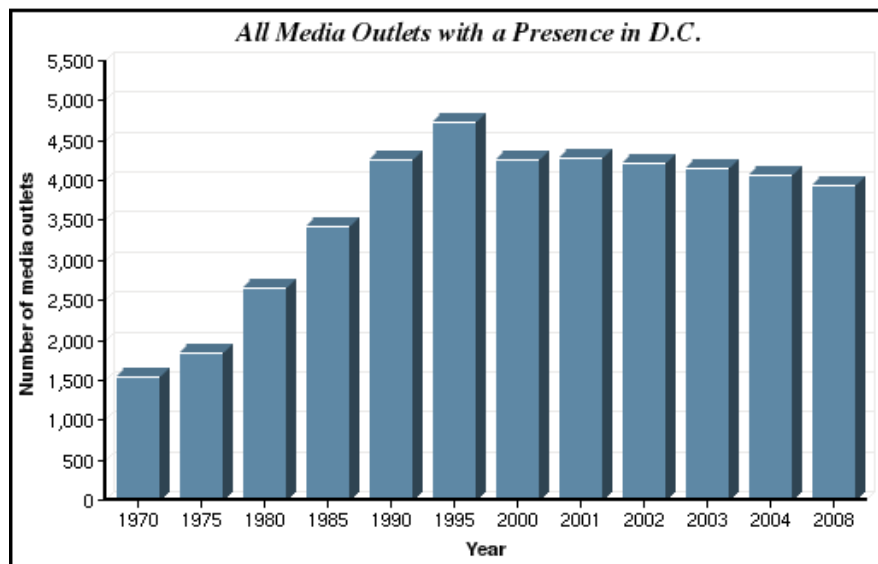
Symbolic of the state of this relationship, George W. Bush is the first president since Theodore Roosevelt not to address the National Press Club during his years in office.

## THE NUMBERS

There is no comprehensive registry of journalists in the nation's capital providing a definitive database on the changing make-up of the Washington's Fourth Estate. But media directories and accreditation officials at different agencies and government press galleries offer some sense of the numbers, and the different trend lines at each sketch a consistent, reinforcing story.

First, the changes in the Washington press corps did not begin in the last three or four years with the growth of the Internet and the subsequent decline in advertising revenue—let alone with the current economic slowdown. The number of journalists in Washington appeared to peak in the mid-1990s and has been sliding for 15 years. The peak for newspapers was probably closer to 20 years ago.

Second, heading into 2008, the number of journalists in Washington was not appreciably different than it was four years earlier, and it remained more than twice the size of the Washington press corps at the time of Watergate, perhaps a high water mark for the prestige of Washington reporting.



**Note:** In many cases, the "presence" may be individuals with part time affiliations at several news organizations.

**Source:** Hudson's Washington News Media Contacts Directory

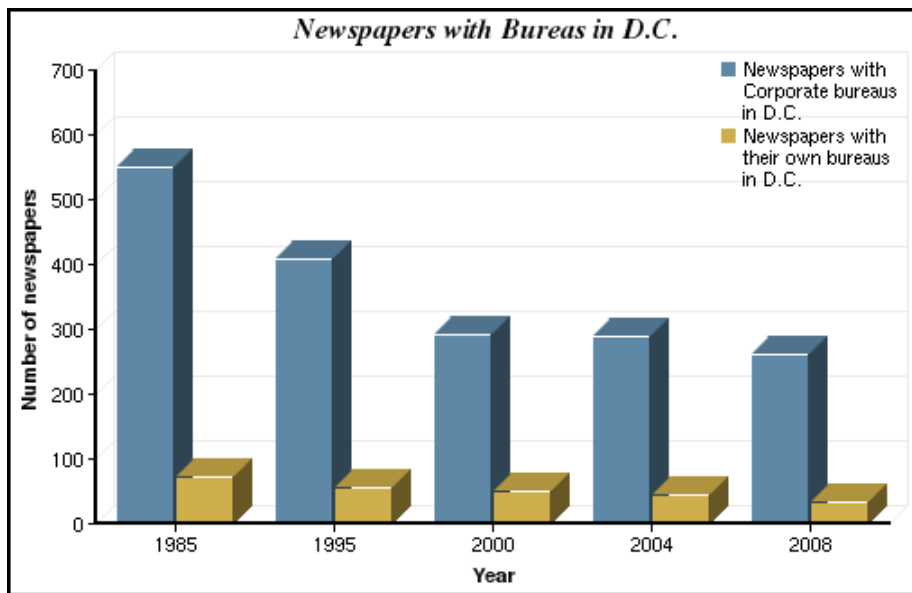
While, there is considerable evidence of more substantial cutbacks in the last six months of 2008, the real story is in where those journalists work and the kind of coverage they are providing.

That story begins with the startling degree to which the mainstream press serving the general public and oriented to covering government according to the geographic lines around which representative democracy was designed has shrunk.

Consider the evidence:

First looking at newspapers with bureaus in Washington, of the nation's 1,400 newspapers, 32—representing just 23 states—had their own bureaus in Washington at the beginning of 2008, according to Hudson's Washington News Media Contacts Directory. That is half the number of the mid-1980s, when 71 newspapers were representing 35 states. Add, in some additional cutbacks announced late in 2008, the number covering the Obama Administration is almost certainly lower—probably closer to 25.

Some might think that this is because more outlets are now represented by corporate bureaus—those representing a chain of multiple newspapers. Not so. In the same time period, the number of papers represented by corporate bureaus in Washington dropped by more than half to 262, down from 551, according to Hudson's.



Source: Hudson's Washington News Media Contacts Directory

Among the hardest hit are the regional newspapers from around the nation, those who cover the interests of Washington as they pertain to particular states, communities and regions—and who, more than any other media, do the work of covering specific elected representatives and state congressional delegations and interests. Since the mid-1990s, the rolls of the Regional Reporters Association—a group of Washington-based reporters working for smaller, regional newspapers around the country—have shrunk by more than 60%, from around 200 to 73 at the end of 2008.

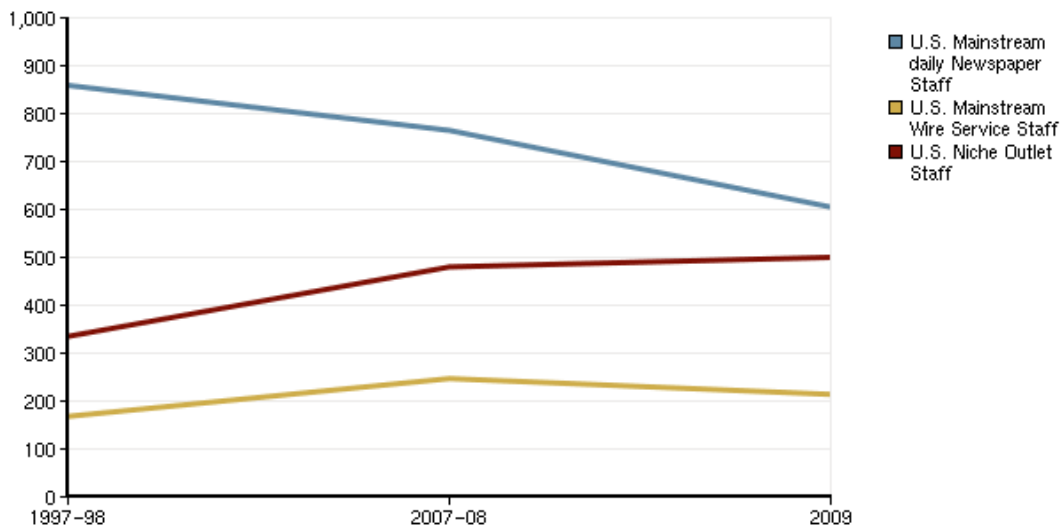
Looking at this another way—the numbers of individual U.S. reporters accredited to Congress—suggests a similar shift away from traditional newspapers and toward niche outlets and to a lesser degree wire services. The total number of reporters accredited by

the Senate Press gallery to cover Congress actually remained relatively steady from the 1997-98 Congress to 2008-09 (increasing slightly in 07-08 but then declining again in 2009), according to an analysis of Congressional Directories.<sup>4</sup> But the make up of those reporters changed dramatically. Newspapers reporters went from representing nearly two-thirds of the staff in 1997-98 to accounting for less than half of the staff in 2008-09.

Staff from U.S. niche publications, on the other hand, increased from 25% of the total staff in 1997-98 (about 335 reporters) to 38% in 2008-09 (about 500 reporters).

The number of wire service reporters accredited to the Hill grew for a time, in large part due to expansion of the Reuters and AP bureaus. But then in 2009 they lost some of that gain. In 1998, 167 held Congressional credentials. By 2008, that number had grown to 247. But in 2009, that number fell again to 214.<sup>5</sup> As a result, wire representation overall increased just slightly from 12% in 1998 to 16% in 2009.

*U.S.-Based Daily and News Agency Media Accredited to the Senate Press Gallery*



Overall, the total number of organizations with Hill credentials declined from 165 in 1998 to 149 in 2008 and then 137 in 2009 – a 17% drop.

<sup>4</sup> In our February study, PEJ reported different data for newspapers in the Hill press galleries: we reported the number of newspapers accredited to the Hill, not reporters. We have since discovered that in 1989 the Congressional Directories changed the way they reported data for newspapers, though that change in methodology was not noted in the directory. Separate listings for newspapers represented solely by a corporate chain bureau reporter were dropped, with only the corporate bureau left listed. Thus at a time when chain bureaus were beginning to replace individual newspaper bureaus, the directories showed a 72% drop in the number of newspapers on the Hill, which overstates the actual decline. PEJ has recounted the data, identifying each reporter as a way to get a comparable count of reporting strength on the Hill.

<sup>5</sup> Wire services included here are AP, Reuters and UPI for 1997-98 and 2007-08. As of the 2008-09 Congress, the UPI no longer has any staff accredited. Bloomberg is counted among niche or specialty media.

***U.S.-Based Daily and News Agency Media Accredited to the Senate Press Gallery***

	<b>1985-86</b>	<b>1997-98</b>	<b>2007-08</b>	<b>2009</b>
U.S. Mainstream Daily Newspaper Staff	734	859	765	605
U.S. Mainstream Wire Service Staff	201	168	247	214
U.S. Niche Outlet Staff	N/A	335	480	500
<b>TOTAL U.S.-Based Reporters</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>1362</b>	<b>1492</b>	<b>1319</b>

*Note: For 1985-86, the figures for the total U.S.-based reporting staff and niche outlets were not available.*

Something similar, though far less drastic, has occurred in local television and radio. Though the amount of Washington coverage used is more limited, the number of local TV and radio stations with access to feeds and news stories from corporate news bureaus in Washington has fallen 37% from the mid-1980s to 92 stations, down from 146, according to Hudson's Directory. The number of states represented by that number is unchanged at 42. (Nearly all of these are corporate bureaus or syndicated operations serving client stations. Only two local TV or radio stations operate independent bureaus, about the same as 20 years earlier when there were three.)

Those few individuals who operated their own news services, such as Mignon C. Smith, whose Washington reporting in the mid-1980s went to as many as 80 Alabama radio stations, also have dropped out of the listings.

The numbers are similarly down for the television networks. The number of news executives, correspondents and anchors in Washington for the three traditional broadcast networks has dropped by more than half since the 1980s, according to Hudson's, from 110 in 1985 to 51 in early 2008—and that was before a round of cutbacks in 2008. Moreover, the sense is that the cutbacks in off-air staff, camera, sound and producers are even greater. Indeed, Hudson's lists includes 84 executives and correspondents in Washington in its 2008 edition for the six cable and broadcast news divisions, less than the 127 included in 1985 when there were just four divisions (ABC, NBC, CBS and CNN).

ABC News, for example, listed a staff of 38 in 1985, with two correspondents assigned to the State Department, three to the White House and three to Congress. In 2008, the directory listed the staff size at 12.

Robin Sproul, Vice-President and Washington Bureau Chief for ABC, says part of this shrinkage reflects a transfer of news shows from Washington to New York—Nightline is one recent example—but that economic belt-tightening also has played a role. She estimated the number of Washington-based correspondents had declined by about 20% since 2001. However, as in many daily newspaper newsrooms the bureau has built up staff to provide Washington content for the network's digital platforms, including its website, abcnews.com, which has gone from zero to eight staff members during the

George W. Bush presidency. The most recent hire was just added to cover the Treasury and the economy.

TV Networks: Executives and On-Air Staff in D.C.				
	1985	2000	2004	2008
ABC	46	25	24	15
NBC	34	14	20	20
CBS	30	18	15	16
CNN	17	34	30	26
FOX	--	12	11	7

**Note:** Data do not include technical, video, sound, and support staff

**Source:** Hudson's Washington News Media Contact Directory

“This was an area we had essentially cut out of [the Washington bureau] 10 years ago,” Sproul said.

As with executives at other networks, Sproul’s main concern as the Obama presidency begins is how to keep and build on the existing audience for Washington news in an environment of stiff competition from cable, satellite and a growing variety of online competitors—some of which she called “completely unreliable”.

“How do we continue to tell the story to people in their 20s, early 30s, and mid-30s? How do we reach them? How do we know where to reach them and how do they know they can trust us? These are the challenges,” she said.

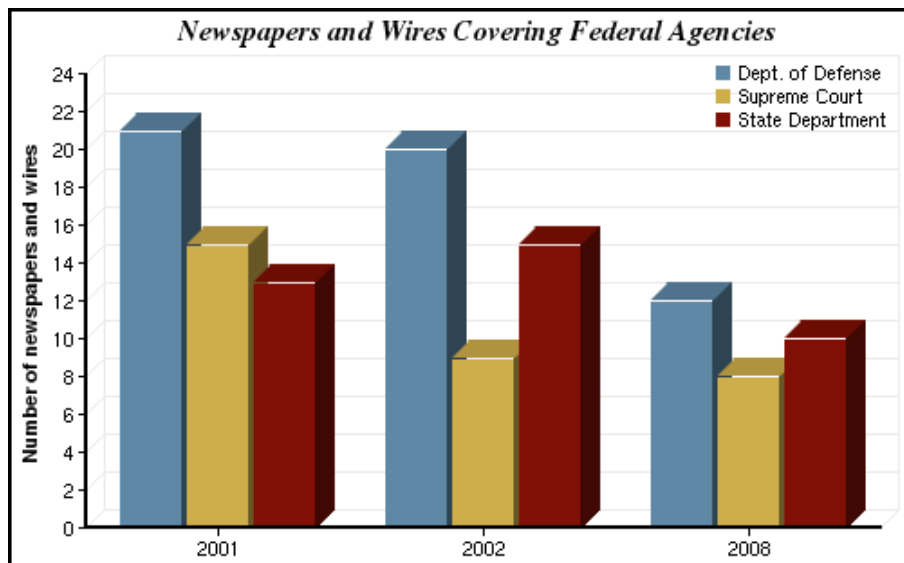
The weekly news magazines, another former important element of the Washington press corps has been buffeted by many of the same forces that affect daily newspapers. The two most prominent news weeklies, Time and Newsweek, now operate with less than half the Washington staff they had in the mid-1980s. Time, which at the beginning of 2008 operated with an editorial staff of 14, according to Hudson listings, will end the year with just over half that many. Newsweek, which deployed a Washington staff of 23 to cover the first year of the George W. Bush Presidency, dipped to 14 at one point before rebuilding to 20 as it prepares to cover the early months of the Obama administration. Amid reports that it plans to shift resources more on analysis and more important, but off-the-news issues, the magazine generally has announced more cuts are coming—probably more than 30 from news—though it is unknown who or where.

The day after the November general election, reports surfaced that U.S. News & World Report, the country’s long-time number three news magazine and the only one of the three based in the nation’s capital, would effectively take itself out of the print news magazine business. It will continue to produce news for a web edition, but the print version will shift to a monthly frequency, with issues devoted to in-depth analysis on subjects such as higher education, health care and consumer product analysis. According to Editor Brian Kelly, the new strategy will be “to drill more deeply into issues that lend



themselves more easily to a print format.” But, he noted, “The print version is a monthly guide and not at all like what we used to think of as a news magazine.”

With an overall editorial staff of about 120, the reporting power that the Washington-based U.S. News & World Report brings to these new marching orders is roughly half of what it was eight years ago when George W. Bush entered the White House, although the editorial cuts have been disproportionately aimed at areas outside Washington.



**Source:** 2001 and 2002 data from "Who's Got the Beat", *American Journalism Review*, Oct. 2002; 2008 data from PEJ research

All of this means that fewer federal agencies and less of the U.S. government are being regularly monitored. The number of mainstream wire services and newspapers staffing the Pentagon as a full-time beat appears to have dropped from 21 to 12 since 2001. At the State Department, the number has fallen from 15 to 10, and at the Supreme Court, it has gone from 15 in 2001 to eight today. In some instances, such as the Pentagon, the staffing drop could be attributed in part to a less intense volume of news. However, many of the outlets dropping away are those who have suffered significant cuts.

There were no comparable independent figures for network television beat reporting, but list of beat assignments provided by the networks themselves frequently suggest a wider net of coverage than government officials say is real. Viewers who think the correspondent they see on air is working a story, developing sources and always on the scene may be laboring under a misimpression. Although network correspondents are listed as covering beats such as the State Department, agencies or even Congress, often they are no longer on scene anymore.

During the final five months of Condoleezza Rice's tenure as Secretary of State, only one network television correspondent joined her on overseas trips. That correspondent, Laura

Logan of CBS, traveled just once. And not a single network television correspondent showed up for Rice's farewell news conference held shortly before she left office.<sup>6</sup>

Several agencies that did not receive full-time coverage from any print outlet by as recently in 2001, such as the Department of Interior or the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, remain without a dedicated beat reporter. The Wall Street Journal, for example, assigns a reporter to the Interior Department, but that same reporter is also assigned to cover the Environmental Protection Agency and the Energy Department. Nuclear Regulatory Commission officials say they are frequently contacted by reporters from the New York Times, the Las Vegas Review Journal and the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, but in each case, these reporters have beat responsibilities beyond the NRC.

The number of journalists accredited to the White House shrunk dramatically during the George W. Bush presidency from about 1500 to 800. Those monitoring the numbers, however, attribute this more to tougher accreditation requirements in a post-9/11 world than to any lack of interest. But here too, there are indications financial pressures on daily newspapers play a role. For example, tighter budgets at large dailies have forced cut backs on coverage of out-of-town presidential trips to such an extent that some complain a long-standing White House print travel pool is effectively broken. For years, the pool has covered virtually every presidential trip. Interest in President Obama's initial months could revive the pool in the short-term, but there is concern that costs could eventually kill it.

## **A GRIM 2008**

If the numbers show that the decline in mainstream media presence in Washington is really a continuation of a trend that dates back to the mid-1980s, then 2008 will almost certainly be considered a turning point. For these figures do not reflect by and large the cutbacks that befell Washington in the last six to 12 months.

For that, it becomes useful to look at what has happened bureau by bureau.

Consider that during the course of 2008, a host of bureaus—corporate and individual—simply vanished altogether, while others were reduced exponentially. Newhouse Newspapers, Copley and the Copley News Service, Cox (in March of 2009), the (Salt Lake City) Deseret News, the Fairbanks News-Miner, the Portland Press-Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram, the (MA) Lowell Sun and the (Harrisburg, PA) Patriot-News all closed their Washington bureaus in 2008. Among individual newspapers, the Los Angeles

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<sup>6</sup> State Department Correspondents Assn. records. Interest in the State Department may well jump during the early months of a new secretary of state's time in office. Typically, network correspondents jostle for position at briefings and fight hard to grab a sought-after seat on the first foreign trip. NBC, ABC, CNN and Fox all were present at Hillary Clinton's first public appearance as Secretary of State in the department's 8<sup>th</sup> floor ceremonial reception room. How long this interest remains depends on the public interest in the secretary and story itself.

Times, Chicago Tribune, Baltimore Sun, Orlando Sentinel and the Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel all became part of a single Tribune Co., bureau in November, 2008.

Others hang on by a thread. The Stephens Media Group's Washington bureau, which counted six correspondents as recently as 2006, today has one. Newsday, which had a staff of 15 in Washington when George W. Bush took office in 2001, has just one correspondent today. Business Week, which had 20 staffers three years ago, now has three.

<b>Staffing in Washington Bureaus</b> number of FTE staff			
<b>News Service</b>	<b>Staff at peak</b>	<b>Staff at end of 2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
<b>Newhouse Newspapers</b>	26	Closed	—
<b>Copley and Copley News Service</b>	9	Closed	—
<b>Hearst News Service</b>	16	4	—
<b>Gannett</b>	28*	25	Cuts expected
<b>Cox</b>	20	14	Expected to close
<b>Los Angeles Times</b>	54	(Bureau Closed)+	+The combined Tribune Co. bureau now employs 35 journalists in total, down from the 95 who worked for the seven surviving Tribune papers at their peak.
<b>Chicago Tribune</b>	20	(Bureau Closed)+	
<b>Baltimore Sun</b>	12	(Bureau Closed)+	
<b>Hartford Courant</b>	5	(Bureau Closed)+	
<b>Stephen's Media Group</b>	6	1	1
<b>Newsday</b>	15	1	1
<b>Business Week</b>	20	3	3

\* Represents staffing levels in early 2007, which may not have been the peak

+The seven surviving Tribune papers include The Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, Baltimore Sun, Hartford Courant, Sun Sentinel (South Florida), Orlando Sentinel and Allentown Pennsylvania Morning Call.

**Source:** PEJ Research

And some have been collapsed in a way that may not reveal the full extent of the reductions. Among the prime examples here is what happened to the Los Angeles Times in 2008. The Times, the largest paper west of the Mississippi once rivaled the New York Times, Washington Post and Wall Street Journal in the breadth of its reporting. As recently as 2004, the Times matched anyone in the size and talent of its Washington bureau with a news staff of 54, including an investigative team of six reporters and its own editor. Today, neither that investigative team nor the L.A. Times Washington bureau still exists. Last November, the one remaining I-team member, together with 17 other Times journalists and editors became part of a joint Tribune Co., Washington bureau.

At their peak, the seven surviving Tribune newspapers with DC staff collectively counted about 110 Washington-based reporters and editors. Today, the combined editorial strength of the bureau that serves seven of those eight papers has about a third of that, 35. (Tribune sold Newsday last spring). About half those work for a “national bureau” filing a general report, while each paper retains one or two correspondents focused on a specific community or region. A couple of others write for the editorial or op-ed pages of either the L.A. Times or the Chicago Tribune.<sup>7</sup>

Among the major U.S. dailies, only the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal have managed to maintain their Washington bureau staffing levels at or near historic highs.

Salt Lake Tribune Correspondent Thomas Burr, the current president of the Regional Reporters Association, which represents smaller papers around the country, says 15 of his members vanished in the months since he took over the organization in July of 2008. That represents roughly 20% of his membership and includes the Deseret News, ending more than six decades of Washington coverage from that paper.

“It seems like just about every time I send out an email [to members], somebody’s address bounces back,” Burr said. “We sometimes joke that we’re becoming an endangered species.”

Sylvia Smith, Washington editor of the Ft. Wayne, Indiana, Journal Gazette, recalled that she was one of 14 Washington-based reporters working for Indiana news outlets when she first arrived in 1989. Today, there are just two—herself and a colleague from the Gannett News Service who provides content to seven of the chain’s dailies in the state. “When the Indiana press corps has a meeting with someone now, it’s a very intimate gathering,” she commented.

## **THE RISE OF NICHE**

If the mainstream media have shrunk so dramatically, even before the last year, how is it that the overall numbers of journalists in Washington have not?

The answer is that a new Washington media have evolved, but they are far from the more egalitarian or citizen-based media that advocates of the digital age might imagine. Instead, this new Washington media cohort is one substantially aimed at elites, often organized by industry, by corporate client, or by niche political interest.

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<sup>7</sup> Of the 35 journalists in the current joint Tribune bureau, 4 work exclusively for the Los Angeles Times, 3 for the Chicago Tribune, 2 for the Baltimore Sun and 1 each for The Hartford Courant, the Orlando Sentinel, the Sun Sentinel (South Florida) and The Morning Call (Allentown, PA). The remaining 22 write mainly for a so-called “family wire” that serves all Tribune Co. newspapers, including the Daily Press (Newport News, Va.)

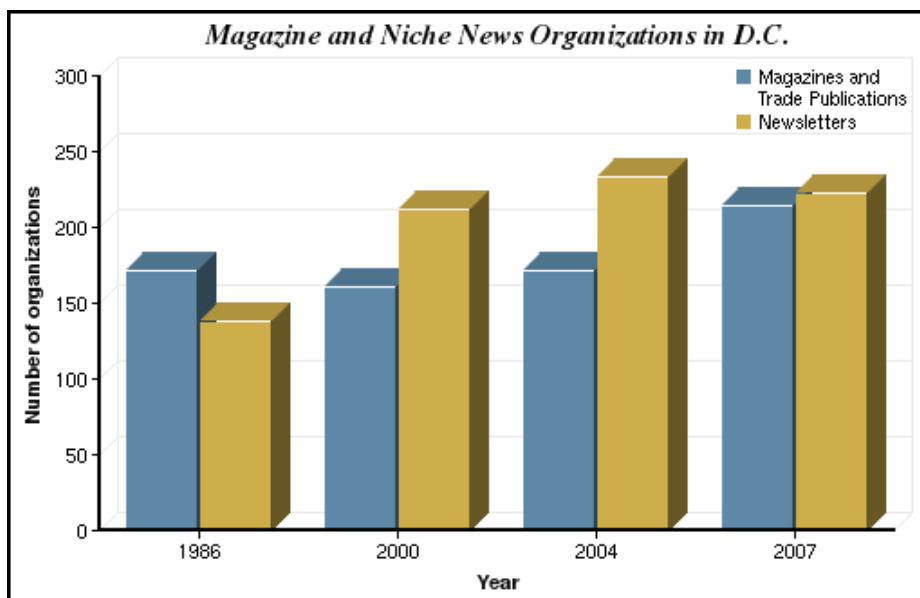
It represents the dramatic expansion of a once small niche sector of the Washington press corps—a group that as recently as a decade ago amounted to a couple of Capitol Hill newspapers that covered the nuts and bolts of Congress for staffers and lobbyists and a disparate collection of trade magazines and print newsletters that tracked narrow issues for those working industries ranging from aviation and health care, to energy and construction. For the most part, mainstream media journalists—and much of Washington itself—looked down upon the work of these publications as both boring and peripheral to the “real” challenge of covering Washington politics. The dream of many niche sector journalists was to land work with a major mainstream outlet.

Not any more. Today, many of Washington’s most experienced and talented journalists no longer explain the workings of the federal government to those in the general public, but to specialty audiences whose interests tend to be both narrow and deep.

These are publications with names like ClimateWire, Energy Trader, Traffic World, Government Executive and Food Chemical News. Their audiences vary, but most readers find the content increasingly important—even crucial—for their job, their business and their industry. Because of this, readers—usually with employer support—are willing to pay significant subscription fees—high enough that some are profitable with small readerships and little advertising.

The editor of one niche organization, Kevin Braun of Environment & Energy Publishing says his subscribers include state governments, law firms, lobbyists, corporations active in the field and non-profit environmental groups

The number of niche publications in Washington has been rising since the 1980s. Hudson’s listings of specialty magazines, newsletters and periodicals, for example, jumped up by roughly one-third between 1985 and 2008 and by nearly 20% between 2004 and 2008.



Source: *The Capital Source Directories*

According to the 1986 Capitol Source Directory, 138 newsletters had Washington bureaus or staff. In 2007, that number was 223, a rise of 61%. The number of trade publications and magazines rose 24% during that time, to 214, up from 172. The listings in a different directory, Hudson's, puts the growth of niche publications generally since 1985 (including newspapers, magazines and newsletters) at 48%.

Today, it is the niche, not the mainstream, media that blanket coverage of Congress and other important arms of the federal government. And the reports today are not only daily but often more instantaneous than that.

Among the biggest and best known is Bloomberg News. The news agency offers some coverage that the general public can see on its website or via aggregators such as Yahoo!, but its bread and butter is a top-line base of about 275,000 clients worldwide, which include financial institutions, business groups, government agencies, well-to-do individuals, or anyone else with economic interests and a willingness to pay \$18,000-plus a year per lease for the terminal needed to receive the service.

The company, which had no regular presence on Capitol Hill in the mid-1980s, had 112 staff members accredited in 2008, close behind the 134 of the Associated Press. It also has experienced, respected beat reporters covering key federal agencies, including the Pentagon, the State Department, Treasury and the White House. Its White House correspondent, Edwin Chen, who once covered both Congress and the president for the Los Angeles Times, will become president of the White House Correspondents Assn. in the spring of 2009.

Most of these publications are far less known to the general public. Over the past decade, for instance, Environment & Energy Publishing has grown from a print-only weekly dealing with environment and energy legislation in Congress put out by a handful of

reporters and a readership of about one thousand. Now, it's a stable of six editorial online products, including a daily webcast that carries interviews and analysis with influential figures in the energy and environment field. The group's first foreign bureau—in Brussels—is scheduled to open in early 2009, and a second in Asia is planned within the next year. The combined readership is just 40,000.

The growth of this niche media has been fueled by a perfect storm of events—a dramatic rise in federal spending and an accompanying jump in potential readership concentrated in and around Capitol Hill and the offices of K Street lobbyists that value the information produced by these publications enough to pay the full cost of gathering it. Meanwhile, rapid IT advances allowed publishers to create niche online publications that could deliver information faster, at lower costs, to ever more targeted audiences and make a profit.

A good example of this explosion is the growth of Congressional Quarterly, Inc., better known as CQ, which began life in 1945 with CQ Weekly, a magazine devoted to comprehensive coverage of events in Congress. Ironically, the magazine was launched by its founders, Nelson and Henrietta Poynter, in an era before regional newspapers opened bureaus in Washington as a way to provide newspaper reporters and editorial writers with information about the actions of members of Congress from their districts and states.

Today, CQ has a very different role. With an editorial staff of about 165—roughly twice that of eight years ago—it provides content for an empire of 38 different editorial products, including CQ Moneyline which tracks the flow of money in politics; BNN White House Bulletin which provides a daily rundown of events around the presidency; CQ LawTrack, which traces how pending legislation might affect existing laws; CQ HealthBeat, which tracks, analyzes major health care issues before Congress; and Committee Amendment Text, which provides scanned sources documents on all available amendments to pending legislation.

Another case is the Platts Division of the McGraw-Hill Companies, which once comprised little more than a daily oil pricing service and a two-page print newsletter of developments in the oil industry. Today, Platts has 15 different editorial products providing information to those working across the energy field, including natural gas, electricity, nuclear power and coal. Most of them consider Washington reporting crucial to their success. One biweekly newsletter called Inside NRC, with a basic subscription price of \$2,495 per year, reports on developments in the important, yet arcane, subject of the nuclear power industry. As the newsletter's name implies, its primary focus is the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, a federal agency covered by no mainstream media as a full-time beat.

If there is a ground zero to this growth of niche media in Washington, it is Capitol Hill, where publications such as Roll Call, The Hill, Politico, the National Journal and CQ jostle for an edge in reporting even the smallest details affecting a legislative proposal, tidbits of insider gossip, or whiffs of political deals, whether formal or informal. Many of these publications have been reporting events on Capitol Hill for decades, but unspoken

gentlemen's agreements that long defined a series of spheres of dominance tended to discourage direct competition—until IT advances and the prospect of major profits transformed the environment into a competitive free-for-all somewhat akin to a 1930s New York City newspaper war.

Roll Call, which began life during the Eisenhower administration as a weekly newspaper covering the politics and policies of Capitol Hill, today publishes four times a week when Congress is in session and supports a lively website, RollCall.com. Last year, the group purchased a legislative tracking service called Gallery Watch, which, in turn, spawned both an online wire service (CongressNow) and a centralized policy and document intelligence service (Briefing Room). In February, 2008, Roll Call joined with Comcast's CN8 network to launch Roll Call TV, whose programming is also focused exclusively on developments in or around Capitol Hill.

Other established Capitol Hill publications, including National Journal and The Hill, have grown at a similar pace over the past decade. In January, 2007, the competitive temperature rose further with the launch of an ambitious start-up called Politico, a print and online newspaper armed with some of Washington's most respected print reporters and an aggressive, yet less formal style of journalism. Its mandate: to tell a more textured, in-depth story of life in three specific areas of Washington's political life—in Congress, in and around the 2008 presidential campaign, and in the lobbying industry centered along Washington, D.C.'s K Street. In less than two years, Politico's staff and circulation have roughly doubled, its print edition will go from three to four times weekly and, according to managing editor Bill Nichols, its goals for the future include becoming the ESPN of federal politics.

## **THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEW WASHINGTON MEDIA**

If the press corps in Washington aimed at the American public in general is shrinking, and the one aimed at self-defined specialized groups is growing, what does that mean about the kind of monitoring of government the press engages in? And how might that change how public opinion is formed and shaped, and does that have implications for policy and the political process?

The answers are necessarily somewhat subjective, but the evidence, and even the feelings of the journalists involved in the process, suggest a growing knowledge gap between those who place high value on information and—organized usually inside professional settings, are willing to pay a premium for that information—and a general citizenry organized more loosely by geography that will find it harder to keep tabs on what is going on.

In short, those influencing policy have access to more information than ever, while those affected by those policies—but not organized to shape them—are likely to be less informed.



The decline of regional newspaper bureaus, for instance, means that sometimes entire state congressional delegations are either under-covered or uncovered completely. Few, for example, believe a national daily or news magazine would have invested the reporting time to follow up the suspicious travel patterns of Southern California Congressman Randy “Duke” Cunningham. Those initial tips led the Washington-based Copley News Service and the San Diego Union-Tribune to unearth corrupt practices serious enough to send Cunningham to jail and win them the 2006 Pulitzer for national reporting.

Less dramatic, yet still important, stories also disappear with the closure of smaller bureaus. Voters in Maine, for example, will likely not see, any time soon, the story Portland Press-Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram Washington correspondent Jonathan Kaplan was researching when he was laid off last July. The story, about the curious relationship between his state’s two senators, Olympia Snow and Susan Collins, is of little interest to any newspaper outside the state, and with no other Washington-based reporter writing solely from the perspective of Maine residents; he was probably the only one with the time and the interest to report it. The Press-Herald was the last newspaper with its own Washington bureau in a state that in the mid-1980s had four. An Associated Press regional reporter in Washington is assigned to track developments of interest to Maine residents, but he also has other responsibilities, including covering for three other states and national labor issues.

“In a small state like Maine, most people have met Snow or Collins, but people don’t know who they really are, what they do, how they interact and how they make decisions,” said Kaplan.

A Washington news bureau of Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism decision to refocus its reporting efforts more on enterprise than beat reporting for smaller, under-served markets also has removed an important provider of congressional delegation coverage to residents of sparsely-populated plains states such as North and South Dakota. Medill Washington Director and Bureau Chief Ellen Shearer said she was unaware if Medill’s clients in these areas have since made alternative arrangements for coverage but added, “There are certainly areas of the country that may not be getting news about their members of Congress now.”

As local outlets abandon coverage of national affairs, one worry is that different public perspectives are lost. Media more closely tied to far away communities tend to see national politics differently than the elite media in New York and Washington. Former Knight Ridder and now McClatchy Bureau Chief John Walcott believes that writing for regional newspapers played an important role in his bureau’s more skeptical coverage of the run up to the Iraq war than was provided by the national press. At a panel honoring the bureau for winning the first I.F. Stone Award from Harvard last year for that coverage, Walcott was asked why his bureau was different.

“One distinction between the way we looked at this march to war and the way the Washington Post and New York Times did was driven by the fact that we don’t own newspapers in Washington or New York,” he said. “We’re not writing for those people. We were writing, and it was very much on my mind the whole time, for the mothers and

the fathers and the sisters and brothers and the sons and the daughters of the people who were going to be sent to fight this war because we own the paper in Columbus, Georgia where Fort Benning is; [in] Lexington, Kentucky, near Fort Campbell; in Fort Worth, Texas, near Fort Hood; [in] Wichita and Kansas City near Fort Riley. That's who we were writing for, and that's who we were thinking about. Is the administration making a case that justifies sending those young men and women into what the administration was arguing were going to be clouds of sarin gas and heaven knows what else? Whereas in Washington, it was all about what was going on inside the Beltway. I think it's a different perspective."

One counterpoint to the larger retrenchment of mainstream media's Washington coverage has been Washington-headquartered National Public Radio, which has expanded its news-gathering staff dramatically over the past decade—from 267 in 2000 to more than 400 at the end of 2008. Its staff covering the federal government has grown from 15 to 20, including new beats focusing on the national policy dimensions of health, the environment and immigration, while NPR's 23-person Science and Health desk also deals with a variety of federal policy issues, ranging from stem cell research to the abortion debate.

The network's programming listening audience rose from 13.4 million in 1998 to 22.4 million near the end of 2008. "Public radio has bucked the trend," said Kevin Klose, who served as NPR's president for over a decade before stepping down in late 2008.

However, the sharp drop in corporate sponsorships during the second half of 2008 triggered by the sharp national economic downturn has led to a \$23 million budget shortfall, and in late 2008, the first staff cutbacks at NPR in recent years were announced. So far the 64 jobs lost have not directly affected the network's federal government coverage.

Critics also tend to point out that National Public Radio, for all of its quality, does not generally lean as heavily toward investigative journalism.

If the press aimed at the general public is disappearing, what is it that the rising niche media are offering instead? Those practicing the new specialized media argue that it is of the highest quality. Indeed, they argue their more sophisticated audiences are even more demanding.

"You have to deliver value because this is a professional audience," said Braun of Environment and Energy Publishing. "Their time is valuable. You need to get them good information so you have to hire good reporters and good, smart editors."

Often, the business model depends on it. For example, the newsletters produced by E & E Publishing, make their money from high-priced subscriptions, not on delivering a wide audience to advertisers as does the general media. A single annual subscription to ClimateWire costs \$3,495, with sliding scale discounts for multi-person subscriptions. A sister newsletter called GreenWire, runs \$3,195 a year with a similar scale of discounting.

Many Capitol Hill publications work on a different model, which rely heavily on corporate or government image advertising to reach the small, but elite audiences of decision-makers that read their products carefully.

Charlie Mitchell, editor of Roll Call admits that it's a huge advantage to have a self-identified market that's vitally interested in the news he is producing.

"Lots of big city dailies are struggling to define who their readers are and struggling to define what they are delivering that the reader isn't getting somewhere else," said Charlie Mitchell, the editor of Roll Call. "We know our readers think we're important. That's a good place to be."

That may alleviate the pressure of doing trendy stories that have little substance. But it is unclear how this coverage impacts democratic process.

To get a sense of what the niche media are like, consider the January 21 edition of ClimateWire. On that day, the online newsletter devoted more than half the stories to the new Obama presidency, but it did so solely through the prism of climate change. The lead story, for example, focused on how Obama's decision to freeze all pending federal regulations might affect major climate change-related rules. Another speculated that Obama's proposed stimulus package might boost renewable energy projects. Another niche publication, Platt's Oilgram News Service, ignored the new administration completely in its Jan 22 edition. Its only Washington-dated story was a report of negotiations between private sector companies to build a \$1 billion natural gas pipeline from Eastern Texas through much of Louisiana.

There certainly seems to be no lack of proven skills among the journalists involved in the niche media. The rise of the niche media, indeed, has effectively reversed the traditional flow of talented reporters in Washington that for decades ran *from* these smaller, narrowly focused special interest trade publications *to* mainstream media newsrooms such as the Washington Post or the Washington bureaus of Time, the New York Times and other prestigious mainstream outlets. Increasingly, the movement today is in the other direction.

Two examples of this trend: Former Wall Street Journal Pentagon correspondent John Fialka, editor of the online newsletter, ClimateWire, runs a staff that includes reporters who previously worked in Washington for the Houston Chronicle, the Denver Post and the (Los Angeles) Daily News. Veteran reporter Lyle Denniston, one of the most respected bylines in Supreme Court coverage while writing for dailies including the Washington Star, the Baltimore Sun and the Boston Globe, now writes about the Court mainly for a loyal following on his own blog called SCOTUSblog, which is hosted by the Washington law firm Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld. He also writes for Boston radio station, WBUR.

But Denniston acknowledges that his audience is now narrower. "The overwhelming amount of energy I put into (my work) is for a small slice of the community that's

shaping public policy, the character and the detail of the law,” said Denniston. “They are getting 50 years of experience.” (To a lesser extent, mainstream news agencies have also benefited from this migration of bylines from daily newspapers.)

There are some examples that suggest the niche media and the opinion media can, on occasion, function as a watchdog on government, even if their audience is specialized and small.

Joshua Marshall, editor-publisher of the political blog, Talking Points Memo, is widely credited with uncovering the political dimension behind the firings of several highly regarded federal prosecutors, which eventually led to the resignation of Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and won Marshall a George Polk Award for his work. “Noting a similarity between firings in Arkansas and California, Marshall and his staff ... connected the dots and found a pattern of federal prosecutors being forced from office for failing to do the Bush Administration's bidding,” noted the Polk Awards announcement.

Roll Call was the first to report the arrest of former Idaho Sen. Larry Craig for allegedly attempting to solicit sex in a Minneapolis Airport public toilet, beating the Idaho Statesman, which had been working on a related story about Craig. And it was Government Executive, a small circulation business magazine for federal government managers, who exposed Census Bureau mismanagement of a \$650 million program to eliminate paperwork by equipping 2010 census-takers with hand-held computers.

But these are largely exceptions for a part of the Washington media known more for its ability to report exhaustively on narrow, complex issues, than for aggressive investigative or what some call public service journalism.

In the end, virtually all of those interviewed for this study expressed concern about the potential impact a shrinking flow of information to the general public would have on the democratic process.

The migration of respected bylines from daily newspapers to a thriving group of niche publications also carries implications of its own about the current state of America's democracy. To the applause of the public at large, incoming president Barack Obama campaigned to “end the failed policies ... that put special interests ahead of working families.” But as he adjusts to Washington, he will deal with a media that has seen talent and experience flow away from mainstream outlets that serve “main street” and moved instead to niche publications that serve Washington's special interests.

“All the reporters for Climate Wire were people laid off from regional newspapers,” said Environment & Energy editor Braun. “These were people I'd never have been able to recruit.”

“As a citizen, I have some discomfort with that,” admitted newspaperman-turned-special interest blogger Denniston.

New York Times Washington bureau chief Baquet goes further: “It means that, in the end, members will not be judged by what they do for their states, but by what they do or don’t do for special interests. That’s not good for democracy.”

Washington reporters who have covered Capitol Hill believe the decline of mainstream reporting—especially the closure of bureaus representing smaller regional papers that focus on their state’s congressional delegation—favors incumbents because the loss of neutral watchdogs give them greater latitude to define themselves.

Suzanne Struglinksy, who lost her job as the Deseret News Washington correspondent last summer when the Salt Lake City-based paper closed its bureau in the capital, says context is vital. “If a member puts out a press release that he’s introduced a bill, it makes him look good, but it may not include all the information in the legislation. If it’s the fifth time he’s done this and the bill’s not going anywhere, isn’t that of interest? Isn’t that worth telling the reader?”

Utah’s congressional delegation, once covered from Washington by two Salt Lake City radio and television outlets, as many as six newspapers and a regional AP reporter in the mid-1980s, is today tracked by one remaining paper, the Salt Lake Tribune and a regional AP reporter, whose beat responsibility also includes developments related to three other states—Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico. Elected members of Congress and those who work on their staff reject the idea that a shrinking local media somehow favors them. They too tend to view the disappearance of regional reporters as a worrisome development.

“It creates greater distance between the general public and Washington,” commented Rep. Jim Matheson (D-Utah). “There’s so much going on in Washington that affects the state that we all lose when there’s a reduction of this information flow.”

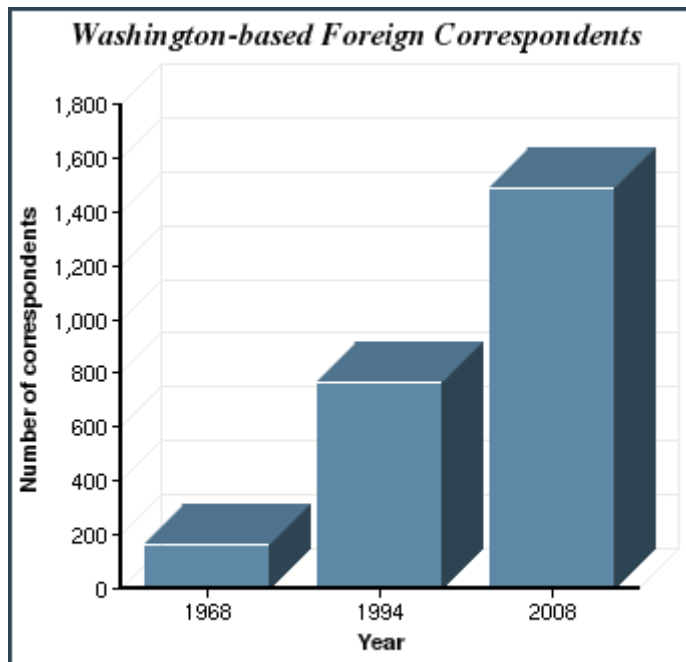
Indiana Senator Richard Lugar’s Press Secretary Andy Fisher noted that Lugar’s high profile as Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman, nuclear proliferation expert and former presidential candidate give him constant national exposure, but a dwindling group of Washington-based reporters working for Indiana papers make it much harder for him to get into the home-state media.

“It’s a bad thing what’s happening,” he said.

## **THE GROWTH OF FOREIGN MEDIA PRESENCE**

One corollary to the changes in the American press in Washington is the rise of a new foreign press.

In pure numbers, few areas of the Washington press corps have experienced greater growth than the international media. In 1968, Washington’s Foreign Press Center opened to serve the estimated 160 foreign correspondents reporting from the nation’s capital. It is unclear just how many different organizations they represented or from how many countries they came, but there was little doubt that by the mid-1990s their numbers had grown substantially. A 1994 United States Information Agency directory listed 507 foreign news organizations from 79 nations and territories working from Washington.



*Source: U.S. State Department Foreign Press Center, Washington*

The Foreign Press Centers database currently lists 796 media outlets from 113 countries and territories represented by at least one correspondent in Washington. Much of the growth of recent years come with an influx of media from Asia, especially China, the Middle East and Africa. All are regions where America’s policies and actions have taken on increased importance over the past decade. Last October, 1,490 foreign correspondents were accredited to the FPC in Washington—roughly 40% of all foreign journalists accredited nationally.

This growth has been spurred by a variety of factors, including technological advances that make communication with home offices continents away cheaper, faster and easier and by the lengthening the shadow cast by America’s impact on issues from trade policy and military alliances to pop music and climate change. The shock of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington coupled with the controversial nature of the Bush administration’s responses in the years since also have raised interest.

The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq spurred visible growth among Third World outlets, especially those from the Middle East, including newly-influential satellite television outlets such as Qatar-based al-Jazeera and Dubai-headquartered al-Arabiya, which broadcast across the entire region free of state controls. Al-Jazeera’s English-language service, which opened its Washington bureau in 2006, had 86 staff members accredited to cover the last Congress. The station’s Arabic service had 19 accredited staff members.

“The American story is so important,” said British Broadcasting Corp., bureau chief Andrew Steele. “It’s front and center of every country’s international news report—especially with the [recent general] election and what comes after that.”

The BBC maintains one of the largest mainstream media news bureaus in the capital, with a staff of about 50—roughly a third larger than it was four years ago. The BBC today also produces several new programs from Washington shaped specifically for American audiences, including World News America and a 24-hour cable channel that mixes news with lifestyle programming.

According to State Department employees who work with the foreign media, the majority of foreign correspondents are full-time employees of the organization they represent, although there also are many stringers or part-time correspondents. Collectively, they tend to be more sophisticated, better educated, and more aware of the complexities of the United States and, thanks to expansions of freedom globally, they are freer to report those complexities.

Certainly there's more than enough to keep foreign correspondents busy. A Senate Agricultural Committee hearing on beef that a decade ago might have drawn the interest of a couple of American reporters, today can bring as many as 20 because of the international interest in one of America's biggest exports.

In January 2007, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack began holding off-camera, informal briefings called "gaggles" daily at 10 AM Eastern time, enabling correspondents serving outlets in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Middle East to update stories from the previous evening with fresh material before the end of their news cycle. The gaggle proved so successful that in September 2008, the State Department moved its routine daily on-camera press briefings forward by two hours—from 12:30 to 10:30 AM Eastern Standard time—a development that has helped position America's message better within the global news cycle.

There were so many foreign reporters at the Democratic and Republican political conventions last summer in Denver and Minneapolis that they were set up with separate filing centers and provided their own briefings daily, as well as preparatory briefings in Washington prior to the convention on such issues as battleground states, the Electoral College and the variety of voting machines used by different states.

Despite all this, the impact of the foreign media on Washington itself is difficult to measure and is likely marginal. The growth, while impressive, has tended to produce a broader rather than deeper coverage of events, with more media outlets from more countries seeking registration. Foreign journalists continue to struggle for access to key decision-makers and because of that rarely break exclusive stories, and their dispatches seem to have little impact on the rhythm the government's business.

"Our access is improving but it's still difficult," said Steele, who said the BBC had tried for months without success for interviews with both main presidential candidates prior to the November election. "There's much more recognition of foreign media in other capitals. Washington has a long, long way to go."

In many ways, the situation of foreign correspondents in Washington constitutes the mirror image of conditions in other capitals, especially in the Developing World, where correspondents from American or European media outlets often find it easier to access the corridors of power than their domestic colleagues. To date, however, the real impact of this growing foreign media is not in the capital, but beyond America's shores. The ability of these correspondents to explain events in Washington and set them within the prism of their own national and cultural interests constitutes an important change in the portrayal of U.S. government actions to the world. As recently as the mid-1990s, this news was provided mainly by American news agencies, CNN International or stories syndicated by groups like the New York Times Service or the Los Angeles Times-Washington Post Service.

This alters both what gets covered and how. Consider, for example, coverage on Feb. 5 from four different outlets.

The BBC's World Service gave prominent Website display to a story from its Washington bureau on a Senate vote to soften a controversial "Buy American" clause in the economic stimulus package after warnings it might spark a trade war. No such story appeared on CNN International's site, Fox News or MSNBC during this time period.

Instead, CNN International's top Washington stories that day were on President Obama's plan to expand the Office of Faith-Based Initiatives and his urgings for a quick passage of the economic stimulus package.

The Washington bureau of Al Jazeera's English service was featuring yet another story. This was one much more controversial in the Arab world: comments by former vice-president Dick Cheney made during an interview with *Politico* critical of the new administration's initial plans to close the Guantanamo Bay detention center and other moves the now former vice president viewed as "soft" on Al-Qaeda.

Meanwhile, the Washington bureau of another Middle East satellite channel, Al Arabiya, was showcasing the Iranian dimension of upcoming U.S.-European diplomatic talks in Germany, yet another story that was not in the American international mix.

In the end, America's global image may well be determined more by the policies of the government than by who is writing about them. The shift in what people are learning about those policies, however, is still significant—and probably one that fits more with a changing world.

"These reporters from abroad work with a greater empathy and understanding of their own country's view of America," said Myron Belkind, who chairs the National Press Club's International Correspondents Committee and served as an Associated Press bureau chief in Europe, South Asia and East Asia. "If you believe the best journalism is done by those who can report and write with a clear perspective of their audience," he argued, "then you have to see this as a positive development."



## Conclusion

There are those who argue that the decline of mainstream media reporting power in Washington is caused by more than the industry's financial struggles. They claim that the editorial model of Washington reporting is broken in a way that makes mainstream media reporting on federal government affairs seem irrelevant, boring or off-key to everyday Americans.

Whatever the reasons, it is clear that editors now believe national reporting is less important to their charge than they once did. A survey conducted by Project for Excellence in Journalism earlier this year found a definite ambivalence to national news among newsroom executives far from the nation's capital. Less than one in five (18%) of the 259 editors responding to the survey considered national news "very essential" to their news product. By comparison, 97% viewed local news as "very essential."

Washington Monthly founder Charles Peters, who is generally credited with rewriting the rules of national political coverage in the 1970s with his magazine's in-depth, straight-ahead style of stories on government and corporate abuse, said in an interview he believed too many Washington journalists have lost touch with their readers. He contended that rising journalistic salaries coupled with the proximity to power had created distance between reporters and the average newspaper reader.

"Washington journalism has become more elitist in its attitude," said Peters, who was raised as part of a West Virginia farming family. "It's become a more educated elite, so they identify with those above them, not those from below. This has happened without journalists being aware of it."

Peters and some others also claim the proliferation of cable television current events and talk-show television has made celebrities of many journalists and elevated the ability to deliver a clever or cynical sound bite above in-depth reporting skills.

But not everyone agrees.

"I think there's an appetite not for insider Washington stuff but for news about Washington—national news that readers do want," said Howell. "I know papers have decided in these tight times to go local, local, local, but that doesn't mean the readers don't want [Washington news]."

Baquet says he simply doesn't believe editors who say Washington reporting is not essential to their news product. "They are fibbing," he said. "You can't tell me this election didn't electrify the country."

Widespread praise for the quality of Washington reporting on the financial crisis raised hopes among doubters that strong, objective, factual reporting about issues central to the lives of individual Americans will once again come into favor.

“You’ve caught me in a rare moment of optimism,” Peters said.

Almost certainly, the federal government is going to play an enlarged role in American lives in the Obama era. And one adage almost certainly applies—as government grows and tries to affect change, so will the efforts of special interests to shape that change.

The news media in place to cover that transformation is very different from the one even Obama’s predecessor arrived to find eight years earlier.

Elites who are plugged into the new fragmented niche media of Washington will know how that government is growing and what it means, and they will be learning it through new media channels. Their fellow citizens who rely on local or network television or their daily newspapers, however, will be harder pressed to learn what their elected representatives are doing.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Research conducted for The New Washington Press Corps came in three main forms: 1) One-on-one interviews with current or former members of the Washington press, 2) Computing and indexing yearly reports from published directories of Washington journalism bureaus and staff and 3) background documents. The research was conducted by Tyler Marshall over three-month period. What follows is a brief explanation of the process involved for each.

### **Interviews**

Much of the material for the report came from one-on-one interviews by Marshall with about 60 sources, almost all of them residing or working in the Washington, D.C., area. More than 20 of these interviews were conducted face-to-face and usually lasted between 30 to 90 minutes. About 40 additional interviews were conducted by telephone and usually lasted between 10 and 60 minutes. With few exceptions, telephone interviews were shorter than those conducted face-to-face. Interview subjects included Washington-based reporters, editors, publishers and other news executives either currently working for daily newspapers, news magazines, radio, network television and online publications in the capital, those who were in the process of leaving or those who had already left work in such jobs.

Also interviewed were academics, executives of non-profit organizations, members of Congress, staff aides of individual senators and congressmen, staff members of the Congressional Press, Radio and Television Correspondents, Periodical Press, Press Photographers galleries and federal government employees, who were either working with the Washington news media or researching it in some way.

### **The Numbers**

There is no single definitive, comprehensive database that lists every news organization and every journalist based in Washington, D.C. The lack of such an accepted, authoritative source is one reason why reporting on changes in the Washington media have been largely anecdotal in nature. However, there are sources—mainly directories, accreditation lists and membership lists—available that do list a significant percentage of those reporters and news organizations based in the nation's capital. After studying several of those sources, we decided to work with three:

- Congressional Directories
- Hudson's Washington News Media Contacts Directories
- The Capital Source

Each reflects a different collection of data about news organizations. Like most organizational directories, the accuracy for any one year is subject to omission, human error and/or inaccurate or incomplete reporting on the part of the news organizations themselves. But each directory, overtime, provides trends about those particular measures.

In addition, the three directories taken together provide broader evidence of shifts in the makeup and character of Washington, D.C. reporting.

The fact that data in the three directories—gathered by different groups in different ways—tended to show similar patterns and trends over time helped to reinforce our conclusions.

#### Congressional Directories

Published for every Congress (therefore, every two years) since 1888, the Congressional Directory lists both the news organizations and individuals accredited by one of the four media galleries— Press, Radio and Television Correspondents, Periodical Press and Press Photographers—to cover Congress. To establish trend lines, we drew data from directories for the 99<sup>th</sup> (1985-86), 105<sup>th</sup> (1997-98) and 110<sup>th</sup> (2007-2008) Congresses. For each of the three Congresses, we tallied the total number of organizations listed by media category (eg: US news agencies and daily newspapers, magazines and periodicals) to measure the change in the number and type of media organization covering Capitol Hill over time. Some of this data appears in the chart titled, “Media Organizations Accredited to Congress.” To track the change in size of selected media organizations over time, we also tallied the number of individuals listed as representing each selected news outlet.

News organizations sometimes accredit every member of their Washington staff, including support staff. Thus the number of congressional accreditations for a news organization sometimes exceeds the number of journalists it employs and the number of actual reporters on the beat for any one year. Still, the changes year to year reveal accreditation patterns over time, and provide one way to identify and track these trends.

#### Hudson’s Washington News Media Contacts Directory

Published annually since 1968, the Hudson’s directory lists news organizations with a presence in Washington by category (eg., newspapers, radio, television, specialty or niche publications, news services, etc.,) and also lists individual journalists working at each organization. Data tallied from the 1985, 2000, 2004 and 2008 editions were used to compile the data on the number of newspapers represented by corporate bureaus and those newspapers with their own Washington bureaus and also the data for the chart that shows television network Washington bureau staffing over time. The preface of most editions of the Hudson’s Directory contains the number of media outlets listed that year as having a physical presence in Washington, DC. That data is displayed in the chart at titled “Media Outlets with a Presence in D.C.”

#### The Capital Source

This directory was published annually (and occasionally twice a year) by the National Journal between 1985 and 2007. It lists media organizations with an office in Washington by category. We tallied the number of organizations listed in these categories to establish population growth or decline over time. Some of that data is used to create the chart, “News Organizations with Presence in D.C.”

### **Background Material**

Background documents for the narrative consisted largely of newspaper, magazine or online articles, most of them written over the past year, relating in anecdotal terms to the decline of U.S.-based daily newspaper reporting power in the nation's capital. Other noteworthy documents included an in-depth article on how news agencies and U.S. daily newspapers covered the agencies of the federal government, written by Lucinda Fleeson: "Who's Got the Beat" published in the Oct. 2002, issue of the American Journalism Review. The narrative also drew from a speech delivered by McClatchy Bureau Chief John Walcott on Oct. 7, 2008, at Harvard University in accepting the first I.F. Stone Medal for Journalistic Independence. The text and a transcript of a follow-up discussion session are available on the Nieman Program site: <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu>.