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6 **IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**
7 **FOR THE DISTRICT OF ARIZONA**
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9 TGP Communications LLC, *et al.*,

10 Plaintiffs,

11 v.

12 Jack Sellers, *et al.*,

13 Defendants.
14

No. CV-22-01925-PHX-JJT

ORDER

15 At issue is the Corrected Emergency *Ex Parte* Motion for a Temporary Restraining
16 Order (Doc. 7, “Mot.”)¹ filed by Plaintiffs TGP Communications, LLC, d/b/a The Gateway
17 Pundit (“TGP”) and Jordan Conradson (“Mr. Conradson”), to which Defendants Jack
18 Sellers, Thomas Galvin, Bill Gates, Clint Hickman, and Steve Gallardo in their official
19 capacities as members of the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors; Stephen Richer in
20 his official capacity as the Maricopa County Recorder; Rey Valenzuela and Scott Jarrett in
21 their official capacities as Maricopa County Election Directors; and Megan Gilbertson and
22 Marcus Milam in their official capacities as Maricopa County Communications Officers
23 (hereinafter collectively referred to as “the County”) filed a Response (Doc. 17, “Resp.”).
24 On November 17, 2022, the Court held a hearing at which the parties presented witness
25 testimony and the Court heard argument on Plaintiffs’ Motion. For the reasons set forth
26 below, the Court denies the motion.
27

28 ¹ Plaintiffs’ Motion corrected only the caption of the Emergency *Ex Parte* Motion for a
Temporary Restraining Order (Doc. 2) they filed on November 12, 2022. (Mot. at 1 n.1)

1 **I. BACKGROUND**

2 TGP is an online news and opinion publication. (Doc. 7-3, Decl. of James Hoft ¶ 1.)
3 Founded in 2004, TGP has developed a large readership and now averages more than two-
4 and-a-half million readers daily. (Decl. of James Hoft ¶ 1.) It describes itself as “a trusted
5 news source for the stories and views that are largely untold or ignored by traditional news
6 outlets.” (Compl. ¶ 26.) Mr. Conradson is a reporter with TGP who covers Arizona politics.
7 (Transcript of November 17, 2022 Hearing (“Tr.”) 35.) Neither TGP nor Mr. Conradson
8 are shy about their libertarian conservative political leanings. (*See* Mot. at 4.) Mr.
9 Conradson testified that his favorite political party is the Republican Party “but I wear that
10 on my sleeve.” (Tr. 38.) He noted that his readers understand his political views:
11 “everybody who reads my work knows that I am very transparent about it.” (Tr. 38.)

12 On September 27, 2022, Mr. Conradson applied for credentials to attend press
13 conferences given by Maricopa County officials and to access certain County facilities.
14 (Doc. 7-2, Decl. of Jordan Conradson ¶ 3.) The County requires reporters to obtain such
15 credentials—a “press pass”—in order to attend press conferences at, or otherwise enter,
16 the Maricopa County Tabulation and Election Center (“MCTEC”) and the tenth floor of
17 the County Administration building in Phoenix, Arizona. (Compl., Ex. 1; Resp. at 2–3.)

18 Roy Fields Moseley, the Communications Director for the County, explained that
19 the County instituted the press-pass requirement in light of logistics and security concerns.
20 (Tr. 60–64.) For example, the Board of Supervisors’ conference room on the tenth floor of
21 the County Administration building can accommodate approximately 50 seats for
22 reporters; after the extensive media interest in the 2020 election in Maricopa County, Mr.
23 Moseley testified it was fair to say that they were anticipating there would be a lot more
24 people wanting to attend press conferences. (Tr. 60–62.) He also testified that there were
25 security issues at MCTEC after the 2020 election, including an incident in which

26 [s]everal people were not members of the media but perhaps might say they
27 are, but they are not what we would call news reporters. They managed to
28 follow legitimate news crews into the lobby of MCTEC. This was a security
 concern. They had to be removed. There was a large crowd gathered outside

1 and we didn't want a repeat of that type of situation when we came up on
2 2022.

3 (Tr. 63.) The County also has installed temporary and permanent fencing at MCTEC,
4 where the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office maintains security. (Tr. 64.)

5 Reporters can apply for a press pass through a page on the County's website.
6 (Compl. Exs. 1, 2.) The webpage states that "[t]he official press pass will allow members
7 of the press to attend news conferences or enter the Elections Department's office to
8 conduct interviews, take photos, and/or video." (Compl. Ex. 1.) The webpage states that
9 the County evaluates "member of the press" based on the following criteria:

- 10 a. Is the person requesting press credentials employed by or affiliated
11 with an organization whose principal business is news dissemination?
- 12 b. Does the parent news organization meet the following criteria?
 - 13 i. It has published news continuously for at least 18 months, and;
 - 14 ii. It has a periodical publication component or an established
15 television or radio presence.
- 16 c. Is the petitioner a paid or full-time correspondent, or if not, is acting
17 on behalf of a student-run news organization affiliated with an
18 Arizona high school, university, or college?
- 19 d. Is the petitioner or its employing organization engaged in any
20 lobbying, paid advocacy, advertising, publicity, or promotion work
21 for any individual, political party, corporation, or organization?
- 22 e. Is the petitioner a bona fide correspondent of repute in their
23 profession, and do they and their employing organization exhibit the
24 following characteristics?
 - 25 i. Both avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest;
 - 26 ii. Both are free of associations that would compromise
27 journalistic integrity or damage credibility;
 - 28 iii. Both decline compensation, favors, special treatment,

1 secondary employment, or political involvement where doing
2 so would compromise journalistic integrity; and

- 3 iv. Both resist pressures from advertisers, donors, or any other
4 special interests to influence coverage.

5 This list is not exhaustive. The time, manner, and place limitations or needs
6 of any one event may require consideration of additional factors.

7 (Compl. Ex. 1.) Mr. Moseley testified that a team of eight County employees reviews press
8 pass-applications, which must receive two “yes” votes to be approved. (Tr. 64–65.)

9 On September 30, 2022, three days after Mr. Conradson applied for a press pass,
10 the County notified him by email that his application was denied. (Def. Ex. 13.) The email
11 stated that he was denied based on the following criteria: “You (a) do not avoid real or
12 perceived conflicts of interest and (b) are not free of associations that would compromise
13 journalistic integrity or damage credibility. Therefore, you are not a bona fide
14 correspondent of repute in your profession.” (Def. Ex. 13.) When asked to summarize, in
15 his words, why Mr. Conradson was denied a press pass, Mr. Moseley testified that it was
16 “because he doesn’t avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest. If you look at his social
17 media or his articles, they not only present a conflict. He doesn’t seek the truth and his
18 articles have led to direct threats to Board of Elections officials and employees.” (Tr. 72.)
19 To support the allegation about threats, the County points to *Reuters* articles stating that
20 TGP was cited in highly threatening communications directed at County election
21 employees. (Def. Exs. 17, 18.) The County further cites to a TGP article by Mr. Conradson
22 (Def. Ex. 23) alleging that a County employee deleted files from the County’s Elections
23 Management Server—allegations the County denies. (*See* Def. Ex. 18.) In the article, Mr.
24 Conradson included the employee’s name and photograph. (Def. Ex. 23; Tr. 47.) According
25 to one of the *Reuters* articles, readers left highly threatening comments about the employee
26 in the comments section of the article. (Def. Ex. 18.) Mr. Conradson testified that he was
27 “not aware that people got threats as a result of something I wrote.” (Tr. 47–48.)

28 The September 30, 2022 denial email stated that Mr. Conradson could appeal the

1 decision by sending a reply email “stating the reasons it should be reconsidered.” (Compl.
2 Ex. 4.) It also stated that “any press conference about the 2022 Election will be streamed
3 to a Maricopa County YouTube channel and you are welcome to view it.” (Compl. Ex. 4.)

4 On November 10, 2022, Mr. Conradson sent a reply email appealing the County’s
5 decision. (Compl. Ex. 4.) In his email, Mr. Conradson stated that the denial violated his
6 rights under the First Amendment and that “I will be coming in shortly to attend a press
7 conference and receive my credentials.” (Compl. Ex. 4.)

8 On November 12, 2022, TGP and Mr. Conradson filed their Complaint in this Court
9 raising one claim alleging a violation of the First Amendment under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The
10 same day, Plaintiffs filed the instant motion. The relief that Plaintiffs request includes the
11 “[i]mmediate authorization of [Mr.] Conradson’s press credentials or in the absence of
12 such credentials, access to newsgathering and press conferences equal to other press
13 outlets”; a declaration that the denial of press credentials to Mr. Conradson was
14 unconstitutional; and a declaration that the press-credential regulations are
15 unconstitutional. (Compl. at 11–12.)

16 **II. LEGAL STANDARD**

17 Courts use the same standard for issuing a temporary restraining order as that for
18 issuing a preliminary injunction. *Spears v. Ariz. Bd. of Regents*, 372 F. Supp. 3d 893, 926
19 (D. Ariz. 2019). To obtain preliminary injunctive relief, plaintiffs must show: (1) they are
20 “likely to succeed on the merits”; (2) they are “likely to suffer irreparable harm in the
21 absence of preliminary relief”; (3) “the balance of equities tips in [their] favor”; and (4)
22 “an injunction is in the public interest.” *Garcia v. Google, Inc.*, 786 F.3d 733, 740 (9th Cir.
23 2015) (citing *Winter v. Nat. Res. Def. Council, Inc.*, 555 U.S. 7, 20 (2008)). Employing a
24 sliding scale, the Ninth Circuit has stated that “‘serious questions going to the merits’ and
25 a hardship balance that tips sharply toward the plaintiff can support issuance of an
26 injunction, assuming the other two elements of the *Winter* test are also met.” *Drakes Bay*
27 *Oyster Co. v. Jewell*, 747 F.3d 1073, 1085 (9th Cir. 2013), *cert. denied*, 747 F.3d 1073
28 (2014) (quoting *All. for the Wild Rockies v. Cottrell*, 632 F.3d 1127, 1132 (9th Cir. 2011)).

1 The Ninth Circuit also has stated that mandatory injunctions—those ordering a
2 responsible party to take a specific action, as Plaintiffs seek here—are subject to a higher
3 standard than prohibitory injunctions that preserve the status quo. *Hernandez v. Sessions*,
4 872 F.3d 976, 998–99 (9th Cir. 2017). “Mandatory injunctions . . . are permissible when
5 ‘extreme or very serious damage will result’ that is not ‘capable of compensation in
6 damages,’ and the merits of the case are not ‘doubtful.’” *Id.* (quoting *Marlyn*
7 *Nutraceuticals, Inc. v. Mucos Pharma GmbH & Co.*, 571 F.3d 873, 879 (9th Cir. 2009)).

8 **III. ANALYSIS**

9 At the outset, the Court recognizes the importance of the constitutional rights at
10 issue. The First Amendment protects the freedom not only to publish news and opinion,
11 but also to engage in newsgathering. *Calif. First Amend. Coal. v. Calderon*, 150 F.3d 976,
12 981 (9th Cir. 1998). “The right of the press to gather news and information is protected by
13 the First Amendment because ‘without some protection for those seeking out the news,
14 freedom of the press could be eviscerated.’” *Id.* (quoting *Branzburg v. Hayes*, 408 U.S.
15 665, 681 (1978)). These rights are not absolute, *see, e.g., Neb. Press Ass’n v. Stuart*, 427
16 U.S. 539, 570 (1976), but the Court is, as it must be, solicitous of the First Amendment
17 protections of the free press.

18 **A. Likelihood of Success on the Merits**

19 Plaintiffs put forth several arguments to support a facial challenge to the County’s
20 press-pass restrictions and an as-applied challenge to the denial of a press pass in this case.
21 Broadly, Plaintiffs argue that the County’s press-pass restrictions violate the First
22 Amendment because they are unconstitutionally vague; the procedure in which Mr.
23 Conradson was denied a press pass is void of due process; the denial of a press pass to Mr.
24 Conradson was impermissibly content- and viewpoint-based; and Plaintiffs were
25 selectively treated based on the content and viewpoint of their speech in contravention of
26 equal protection principles. (Mot. at 7–16.) The Court discusses these arguments in turn.

27 **1. Unconstitutional Vagueness**

28 A statute or regulation is unconstitutionally vague if it “fails to provide people of

1 ordinary intelligence a reasonable opportunity to understand what conduct it prohibits” or
2 “authorizes or even encourages arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement.” *Hill v.*
3 *Colorado*, 530 U.S. 703, 733 (2000). Vagueness scrutiny is more stringent when First
4 Amendment rights are implicated. *Butcher v. Knudsen*, 38 F.4th 1163, 1169 (9th Cir.
5 2022). However, “perfect clarity and precise guidance have never been required even of
6 regulations that restrict expressive activity.” *Ward v. Rock Against Racism*, 491 U.S. 781,
7 794 (1989) (citing *Grayned v. City of Rockford*, 408 U.S. 104, 110 (1972)).

8 Plaintiffs argue that the two criteria under which the County denied a press pass to
9 Mr. Conradson—that he neither “avoid[ed] real or perceived conflicts of interest” nor
10 remained “free of associations that would compromise journalistic integrity or damage
11 credibility”—are facially unconstitutional because they fail to make sufficiently clear
12 “what conduct is prohibited.” (Mot. at 10–11.) The Court is unpersuaded at this juncture.

13 As an initial matter, the County has not “prohibited” reporters such as Mr.
14 Conradson from the conduct described in the criteria, at least not in the sense of triggering
15 any kind of civil or criminal penalties. Rather, the press-pass criteria are just that—a set of
16 standards by which the County determines whether to grant reporters access to events and
17 facilities that, although “public” in the sense that they are maintained for the benefit of the
18 community, are not open to the general public as a matter of right. Moreover, the criteria
19 that Plaintiffs challenge are only two among several characteristics of journalistic practice
20 that the County considers. These criteria should be considered in the context of the press-
21 pass scheme as a whole. *See Butcher*, 38 F.4th at 1176 (“We agree that in assessing a
22 vagueness challenge, we must consider [the] law as a whole.”) (citations omitted).

23 Undercutting Plaintiffs’ argument is the fact that the County drew its press-pass
24 criteria directly from the criteria used by the Office of the Governor of Wisconsin, which
25 were in turn based on standards used by the Wisconsin Capitol Correspondent’s Board and
26 in the United States Congress. (*See* Def. Ex. 2.) The Seventh Circuit upheld the
27 constitutionality of these same criteria just last year. *John K. MacIver Inst. for Pub. Policy,*
28 *Inc. v. Evers*, 994 F.3d 602, 606, 610–15 (7th Cir. 2021) (“*MacIver*”). Although the

1 Seventh Circuit did not consider a vagueness challenge in that case, the court of appeals
2 nonetheless provided detailed analysis of these criteria, indicating that their meaning is not
3 as elusive as Plaintiffs suggest. *See id.* at 610–15; *see also id.* at 610–11 (noting “[s]imilar
4 standards are also used by other governmental bodies such as the United States Congress”).

5 Regarding the first challenged criteria, Plaintiffs question whether it is sufficiently
6 clear “what an actual conflict of interest could be for a journalist.” (Mot. at 10–11.) They
7 further argue that “it is impossible to determine how a journalist may avoid being *perceived*
8 to have a conflict of interest.” (*Id.* (emphasis in original).) Conflicts of interest are familiar
9 to the legal system. *See, e.g.*, Ariz. R. Sup. Ct. 42, ER 1.7, 1.8. It is true that what constitutes
10 a conflict of interest is less obvious in the journalism context—for one thing, journalists do
11 not have clients with discernable interests in the way that lawyers do. However, the Society
12 of Professional Journalists’ (“SPJ”) Code of Ethics uses the term, indicating that the term
13 has broadly understood meaning among practicing journalists. (Def. Ex. 12 (stating that
14 “[j]ournalists should . . . [a]void conflicts of interest, real or perceived”).)² Plaintiffs’
15 expert, Professor Gregg Leslie, testified that conflicts of interest in the journalism context
16 would include, for example, reporting favorably on a publicly traded company while
17 owning stock in that company. (Tr. 15–16.)

18 The County urges and employs a broader interpretation of the term that includes a
19 reporter such as Mr. Conradson reporting on issues for which, and candidates for whom,
20 he also advocates. (*See* Tr. 70.) There is therefore some merit to Plaintiffs’ argument about
21 a lack of consensus as to the meaning of a conflict of interest in the journalism context.
22 (Tr. 93.) But there is reason to believe that the County’s interpretation is not an outlier. For
23 example, the Arizona Senate’s Media Rules state that applicants for media credentials
24 “must not be engaged in any lobbying or advocacy, advertising, publicity or promotion of
25 any individual, political party, group, corporation, organization or a federal, state or local

26
27 ² The Court references the SPJ’s Code of Ethics as evidence only of the use and meaning
28 of the terms in the County’s criteria within the journalism community. Plaintiffs’ expert,
Professor Gregg Leslie, noted that the Code was not intended to establish legally
enforceable rules of journalistic practice; the Code itself states that it “is not, nor can it be
under the First Amendment, legally enforceable.” (Def. Ex. 12.) The point is well taken.

1 government agency” Arizona State Senate, “Media Rules,”
2 <https://www.azsenate.gov/alispdfs/SenateMediaRules.pdf>.

3 Turning to the second challenged criteria, Plaintiffs question what it would mean to
4 be “free of associations that would compromise journalistic integrity or damage
5 credibility.” (Mot. at 11.) As before, there is reason to believe these terms are more broadly
6 understood than Plaintiffs suggest. These criteria find analogue in the SPJ’s Code of Ethics,
7 which states that “[j]ournalists should . . . avoid political and other outside activities that
8 may compromise integrity or impartiality, or may damage credibility.” (Def. Ex. 12.) Prof.
9 Leslie agreed that part of being a good journalist is to “stay away from anything that makes
10 you look biased” and “don’t do anything that is going to damage your credibility,” although
11 he disputed that this was anything more than a “very broad statement” and “an aspirational
12 goal.” (Tr. 16–17.) Further, it is not clear that these criteria “authorize[] or even encourage[]
13 arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement,” *Hill*, 530 U.S. at 733, given that the County
14 granted press passes to other publications considered to be conservative-leaning, such as
15 Fox News and Newsmax. (Tr. 65–66.)

16 Thus, while Plaintiffs have validly questioned the precise contours of the County’s
17 criteria, they have not established they are likely to succeed on their vagueness claim. Law
18 demands clarity, of which the criteria are not a perfect model. But “‘perfect clarity is not
19 required’”—even where First Amendment rights are implicated—and “‘we can never
20 expect mathematical certainty from our language.’” *Human Life of Wash. v. Brumsickle*,
21 624 F.3d 990, 1019 (9th Cir. 2010) (first quoting *Cal. Teachers Ass’n v. State Bd. of Educ.*,
22 271 F.3d 1141, 1150 (9th Cir. 2001), and then quoting *Grayned*, 408 U.S. at 110).

23 **2. Due Process**

24 “Procedural due process imposes constraints on governmental decisions which
25 deprive individuals of ‘liberty’ or ‘property’ interests within the meaning of the Due
26 Process Clause of the Fifth or Fourteenth Amendment.” *Matthews v. Eldridge*, 424 U.S.
27 319, 332 (1976). Courts considering challenges brought by journalists denied access to
28 government press conferences have persuasively held that, in view of the First Amendment

1 rights at stake, such access qualifies as a liberty interest that may not be denied without due
2 process. *See Sherrill v. Knight*, 569 F.2d 124, 130–31 (D.C. Cir. 1977); *Alaska Landmine,*
3 *LLC v. Dunleavy*, 514 F. Supp. 3d 1123, 1134 (D. Alaska), *appeal voluntarily dismissed*,
4 No. 21-35137, 2021 WL 2103741 (9th Cir. Mar. 4, 2021); Doc. 22, Oral Ruling at 6–7,
5 *CNN v. Trump*, No. CV-18-02610-TJK (D.D.C. Nov. 16, 2018); *Getty Images News Servs.*
6 *Corp. v. Dep’t of Def.*, 193 F. Supp. 2d 112, 121 (D.D.C. Mar. 7, 2002).

7 Plaintiffs argue that the procedure by which the County denied a press pass to Mr.
8 Conradson is void of due process. (Mot. at 11–12.) But they have not established that the
9 County failed to afford Mr. Conradson the process he was due. They contend that the
10 County has “no articulated standards” and fails to provide “opportunit[ies] to be heard” or
11 “for meaningful appeal or review.” (Mot. at 11.) Not so. The County published the
12 standards by which it considers press-pass applications, which are reviewed and voted on
13 by a team of eight County employees. (Tr. 64–65.) The denial email stated that Mr.
14 Conradson could appeal the decision by sending a reply email. (Def. Ex. 13.) Mr.
15 Conradson did not take immediate advantage of this appeal process, waiting 41 days to
16 send his reply. (Tr. 45.) He filed this lawsuit two days later. In short, it is incorrect to say,
17 as Plaintiffs do, that “there was no process at all.” (Mot. at 12.) To the extent Defendants
18 had not considered Mr. Conradson’s appeal by the time Plaintiffs filed the instant
19 complaint, that was due entirely to Plaintiffs’ unilateral delay in appealing.

20 Plaintiffs rely on *Alaska Landmine, LLC v. Dunleavy* and *Sherrill v. Knight* to
21 support their due process argument, but each case is distinguishable. In *Alaska Landmine,*
22 the governor stopped providing press-conference invitations to the plaintiff, an online news
23 publication, without ever formalizing a process for determining press access. 514 F. Supp.
24 3d at 1127–28. The district court held the plaintiff was likely to succeed on the merits of
25 its due process claim “given the government’s failure to memorialize an explicit and
26 meaningful standard governing its denial of press conference access.” *Id.* at 1134.
27 Similarly, in *Sherrill*, the United States Secret Service denied White House press
28 credentials to a journalist with *The Nation* magazine based on vague and unarticulated

1 security concerns without any “published or internal regulations stating the criteria upon
2 which a White House press pass security clearance is based.” 569 F.2d at 126–27. The D.C.
3 Circuit held that the “failure to articulate and publish an explicit and meaningful standard
4 governing denial of White House press passes for security reasons, and to afford procedural
5 protections to those denied passes, violates the first and fifth amendments.” *Id.* at 131.

6 Here, however, the County memorialized and published criteria for evaluating
7 press-pass applications; employed those criteria in a semi-formal review process; explained
8 the basis for the denial to Mr. Conradson; and provided an opportunity for reconsideration.
9 Plaintiffs have not shown a likelihood of success on a due process theory.

10 **3. Viewpoint Discrimination**

11 The First Amendment does not provide a right of free and unconditional access to
12 all government properties or events. *See Cornelius v. NAACP Legal Def. & Educ. Fund,*
13 *Inc.*, 473 U.S. 788, 799–800 (1985). “The existence of a right of access to public property
14 and the standard by which limitations placed upon such a right must be evaluated differ
15 depending on the character of the property at issue.” *Perry Educ. Ass’n v. Perry Local*
16 *Educators’ Ass’n*, 460 U.S. 37, 44 (1983). Moreover, the First Amendment rights of access
17 enjoyed by members of the press are no broader than those enjoyed by the general public.
18 *See Branzburg*, 408 U.S. at 684; *Pell v. Procunier*, 417 U.S. 817, 833–35 (1974); *see also*
19 *Cal. First Amen. Coal. v. Woodford*, 299 F.3d 868, 873 n.2 (9th Cir. 2002) (“As members
20 of the press, plaintiffs’ First Amendment right of access to governmental proceedings is
21 coextensive with the general public’s right of access.”) (citations omitted).

22 The Supreme Court generally considers challenges to restrictions on access to
23 government property or events under the public forum doctrine, which provides a
24 framework for evaluating such restrictions based on the type of government property or
25 event in question. *See Minn. Voters All. v. Mansky*, 138 S. Ct. 1876, 1885 (2018);
26 *Cornelius*, 473 U.S. at 799–800; *Perry*, 460 U.S. at 44. Courts have considered closely
27 analogous challenges to restrictions on access to government press conferences under the
28 public forum doctrine. *See MacIver*, 994 F.3d at 609–10; *Alaska Landmine*, 514 F. Supp.

1 3d at 1130–31. Both parties here agree that public forum analysis is relevant, although they
2 dispute where that analysis ultimately leads. (Mot. at 13–14; Resp. at 10–11.)

3 The public forum doctrine generally places government-controlled spaces in three
4 categories: (1) “traditional public forums”; (2) “designated public forums”; and (3)
5 “nonpublic forums.” *Mansky*, 138 S. Ct. at 1885. Different levels of scrutiny apply
6 depending on the forum. *Id.* In traditional public forums—such as parks, streets, and other
7 spaces traditionally held open for public speech—“the government may impose reasonable
8 time, place, and manner restrictions on private speech, but restrictions based on content
9 must satisfy strict scrutiny, and those based on viewpoint are prohibited.” *Id.* (citing
10 *Pleasant Grove City v. Summum*, 555 U.S. 460, 469 (2009)). The same standards apply to
11 designated public forums—spaces “that are not traditionally open for public speech” but
12 which the government has made available for ““expressive use by the general public or by
13 a particular class of speakers.”” *Koala v. Khosla*, 931 F.3d 887, 900 (9th Cir. 2019) (quoting
14 *Seattle Mideast Awareness Campaign*, 781 F.3d 489, 496 (9th Cir. 2015)).

15 The Supreme Court has stated that “the government has much more flexibility” in
16 the third category. *Mansky*, 138 S. Ct. at 1885. The cases variously label forums in this
17 category as “limited public forums”—referring to those “limited to use by certain groups
18 or dedicated solely to the discussion of certain subjects,” *Pleasant Grove*, 555 U.S. at
19 470—or “nonpublic forums”—referring to those that are “not by tradition or designation a
20 forum for public communication.” *Perry*, 460 U.S. at 46. However, the Ninth Circuit has
21 stated that “[t]he label doesn’t matter, because the same level of First Amendment scrutiny
22 applies to all forums that aren’t traditional or designated public forums.” *Koala*, 921 F.3d
23 at 900 n.6 (quoting *Seattle Mideast Awareness Campaign*, 781 F.3d at 496 n.2). Control
24 over access to such forums “can be based on subject matter and speaker identity so long as
25 the distinctions drawn are reasonable in light of the purpose served by the forum and are
26 viewpoint neutral.” *Cornelius*, 473 U.S. at 806; accord *Pleasant Grove*, 555 U.S. at 470.

27 The forums to which Plaintiffs seek access in this case are nonpublic County
28 facilities and press conferences given by County officials. The Court agrees with other

1 courts that have considered closely analogous challenges and concludes that these are
2 nonpublic forums. *See MacIver*, 994 F.3d at 610; *Alaska Landmine*, 514 F. Supp. 3d at
3 1121. Plaintiffs resist this conclusion, arguing the forums here are “limited” public forums,
4 rather than “nonpublic” ones. (Mot. at 13; Tr. 88.) But the Ninth Circuit has stated that this
5 is a distinction without a difference, at least in terms of the scrutiny that applies. *Koala*,
6 921 F.3d at 900 n.6. No matter the label, the test is the same: The County’s press-pass
7 restrictions must be reasonable in light of the purposes served by granting members of the
8 press access to certain County facilities and to press conferences held in those facilities,
9 and the restrictions must be viewpoint neutral. *See Cornelius*, 473 U.S. at 806; *Pleasant*
10 *Grove*, 555 U.S. at 470.

11 The County argues that it has “a right to set criteria for allowing people to get into
12 buildings and to attend press conferences.” (Tr. 81.) This must be true given the County’s
13 well-founded safety concerns and limited space. Plaintiffs do not apparently disagree in
14 principle, conceding that the County is not required simply to let in anyone who presents
15 themselves as a journalist. (*See* Tr. 90–93.) With respect to the specific criteria the County
16 employs to further these interests, the Court agrees with the Seventh Circuit’s analysis in
17 *MacIver* that the first three challenged criteria are “reasonably related to the viewpoint-
18 neutral goal of increasing the journalistic impact of the [government’s] message by
19 including media that focus primarily on news dissemination, have some longevity in the
20 business, and possess the ability to craft newsworthy stories.” 994 F.3d at 610.

21 The County further argues that it has “the right to set up criteria for ethical
22 reporting” (Tr. 83), which broadly summarizes the fourth and fifth challenged criteria. This
23 a more controversial proposition, with which Plaintiffs and their expert, Prof. Leslie,
24 strongly disagree. (*See, e.g.*, Tr. 21.) The Court agrees that this proposition is problematic
25 insofar as it invites the government to play a role in policing the free press, whose
26 constitutionally protected function is to hold the government to account. *See New York*
27 *Times Co. v. United States*, 403 U.S. 713, 717 (1971) (Black, J., concurring).

28 Here, however, the County does not assert a right to establish criteria for ethical

1 reporting to justify policing the practice of journalism, at least not directly.³ Rather, the
2 County asserts this right to justify evaluating reporters' practices to determine whether to
3 grant them access to press conferences and nonpublic County facilities and thereby further
4 the County's legitimate interest in disseminating accurate information to the public.
5 Cabined to this purpose, the Court agrees with the Seventh Circuit's analysis that the fourth
6 and fifth criteria "are reasonably related to the viewpoint-neutral goal of increasing
7 journalistic integrity by favoring media that avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest or
8 entanglement with special interest groups, or those that engage in advocacy or lobbying."
9 *MacIver*, 994 F.3d at 610. Whether better or more precise standards exist is not the point.
10 The County's press-pass restrictions "need only be *reasonable*; [they] need not be the most
11 reasonable or the only reasonable limitation." *Cornelius*, 473 U.S. at 808 (emphasis in
12 original). The Court is not persuaded that the County's restrictions are unreasonable.

13 Nor is the Court persuaded that the County's denial of a press pass to Mr. Conradson
14 was viewpoint-based. In short, Plaintiffs have not substantiated their claim that "[the
15 County] used [its] unfettered discretion to discriminate against the Gateway Pundit because
16 they do not want to be challenged by the Gateway Pundit's style of journalism." (Mot. at
17 15.) Plaintiffs suggest that the County's decision is related to Plaintiffs' reporting about
18 former Maricopa County Supervisor Steve Chucri (Tr. 69), but this is conjectural. They
19 further suggest that the County discriminated against Plaintiffs because of a particular bias
20 against Plaintiffs (Tr. 78), pointing to Defendant Richer's retweet of a tweet hinting that
21 the County instituted the press-pass restrictions to keep Plaintiffs out of press conferences
22 (Doc. 25). Such behavior may be beneath the dignity of the office, but Plaintiffs have not
23 substantiated their claim that keeping them out was the animating reason behind the
24 restrictions. Finally, Plaintiffs suggest that the County discriminated against them based on
25 their political leanings. (Mot. at 4–5.) While the County did take note of Mr. Conradson's

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27 ³ For this reason, the Court is also not persuaded by Plaintiffs' argument that the press-pass
28 criteria are akin to licensing regimes that "condition the exercise of First Amendment
protected rights on 'obtaining a license or permit from a government official in that
official's boundless discretion.'" (Mot. at 13, quoting *Forsyth Cty. v. Nationalist
Movement*, 505 U.S. 123, 131 (1992).) The County is not requiring a license to gather news.

1 political leanings—which the Court acknowledges is a fraught consideration—it did so in
2 the context of evaluating whether he was free from associations that would compromise
3 his journalistic integrity. (Tr. 70.) Mr. Moseley denied that the County rejected Mr.
4 Conradson’s application based on his opinions and noted that the County has granted
5 passes to other conservative leaning publications. (Tr. 65–66, 72.)

6 In sum, while Plaintiffs have raised thorny questions about the County’s press-pass
7 restrictions, they have not shown they are likely to succeed in arguing that the restrictions
8 or their application in this case are unreasonable or constitute viewpoint discrimination.⁴

9 **B. Irreparable Injury**

10 Plaintiffs seeking a preliminary injunction must “demonstrate that irreparable injury
11 is *likely* in the absence of an injunction.” *Winter*, 555 U.S. at 22 (emphasis in original)
12 (citing *Los Angeles v. Lyons*, 461 U.S. 95, 103 (1983)). Plaintiffs note that the “loss of First
13 Amendment freedoms, for even minimal periods of time, unquestionably constitutes
14 irreparable injury.” *Elrod v. Burns*, 427 U.S. 347, 373 (1976). But the Court has already
15 concluded that Plaintiffs have not shown any violations of their First Amendment rights at
16 this juncture.

17 Plaintiffs further argue that there is irreparable harm flowing from the County’s
18 actions here because of Mr. Conradson “not being able to report fully.” (Tr. 86.) The
19 County responds that Mr. Conradson is free to watch broadcasts of County press
20 conferences livestreamed on YouTube. (Resp. at 11–12.) *See Alaska Landmine*, 514 F.
21 Supp. 3d at 1135 (finding the harm of being excluded from press conferences *de minimis*
22 where the public can access livestreams of such conferences). Prof. Leslie testified that the
23 livestreams are “certainly better than nothing,” but noted that “[t]here’s a big difference
24 between being in the room and getting to observe multiple people at once versus what the
25 camera happens to focus on.” (Tr. 23.) Prof. Leslie’s point is well taken, but it is also true
26 that even if Mr. Conradson were permitted to attend press conferences, County officials

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28 ⁴ Because Plaintiffs’ equal protection argument is premised on the same analysis as their
First Amendment claim (*see* Mot. at 16), the Court concludes for the same reasons stated
herein that Plaintiffs have not shown a likelihood of success on an equal protection theory.

1 would be under no obligation to interact with him. *See Alaska Landmine*, 514 F. Supp. 3d
2 at 1135 (noting that “the Governor possesses the discretion to refrain from calling on
3 Plaintiffs or answering their questions.”).

4 The more fundamental problem with Plaintiffs’ irreparable injury argument is that
5 they waited 41 days between receiving the denial email on September 30, 2022 and
6 replying to that email to appeal the County’s decision on November 10, 2022. (Tr. 45.) The
7 County argues that this delay entirely undercuts Plaintiffs’ claims about the urgency of
8 their request for injunctive relief. (Tr. 82–83.) Plaintiffs respond that the circumstances
9 only became urgent on election day, when issues involving voting machines made the
10 County’s elections a national news story. (Tr. 84.) The Court is not persuaded. Plaintiffs’
11 own evidence demonstrates a focus on the County and its administration of elections that
12 existed long before election day, which would itself inevitably be an important news event.
13 Nor is the Court persuaded by Plaintiffs’ argument that there was “escalation of the
14 exclusion” by the County. (Tr. 94.) It was Mr. Conradson who initiated further contacts
15 with County officials that led to the alleged escalation. (Tr. 44–45, 51.)

16 C. The Balance of Equities and the Public Interest

17 “A preliminary injunction is an extraordinary remedy never awarded as of right.”
18 *Winter*, 555 U.S. at 24 (citing *Munaf v. Green*, 553 U.S. 674, 689–90 (2008)). “In each
19 case, courts ‘must balance the competing claims of injury and must consider the effect on
20 each party of the granting or withholding of the requested relief,’” paying particular
21 attention to the public consequences. *Id.* (quoting *Amoco Prod. Co. v. Village of Gambell*,
22 *Alaska*, 480 U.S. 531, 542 (1987)). Analyses of the third and fourth *Winter* factors—harm
23 to the opposing party and consideration of the public interest—merge where the
24 government is the party opposing a preliminary injunction. *Alaska Landmine*, 514 F. Supp.
25 3d at 1120 (citing *Nken v. Holder*, 556 U.S. 418, 435 (2009)).

26 There are burdens on both sides of the balance in this case. Although Plaintiffs’
27 claims to irreparable injury are not as strong as Plaintiffs contend, they are not trivial: Mr.
28 Conradson is not permitted to report from “the room where it happened,” as Prof. Leslie

1 testified in reference to the line from the musical *Hamilton*. (Tr. 28.) On the other side, the
2 County would be significantly burdened by a requirement to open access to its facilities
3 and press conferences, which would create logistics issues and might also exacerbate
4 security concerns. As to Plaintiffs specifically, the County has produced evidence
5 suggesting—though not definitively proving—that their articles have been associated with
6 threats against County employees.

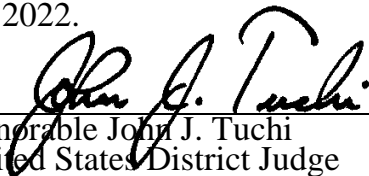
7 Finally, Plaintiffs argue that the County’s actions here are ultimately
8 counterproductive because they create “a high probability of undermining confidence that
9 the election is being tallied in a fair and above-board manner.” (Mot. at 17.) Whether or
10 not this proposition is correct, the Court does not find it to be a matter appropriate for
11 judicial determination. In view of the counterbalancing burdens in this case, the Court
12 cannot conclude that the balance tips in Plaintiffs’ favor. *Winter*, 555 U.S. at 374.

13 **IV. CONCLUSION**

14 Based on the foregoing, the Court finds that Plaintiffs have not carried their burden
15 to show that they are entitled to preliminary injunctive relief at this juncture.

16 **IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED** denying Plaintiffs’ Emergency *Ex Parte* Motion
17 for a Temporary Restraining Order (Doc. 7).

18 Dated this 23rd day of November, 2022.

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20 _____
21 Honorable John J. Tuchi
22 United States District Judge
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