

The logo for The National Press Club, featuring the text "THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB" in white, serif, all-caps font, centered within a dark blue rectangular background.

# THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

## Safety protocols and warm welcome make it easy to enjoy the Club again

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The National Press Club in the last couple of weeks has hosted an in-person newsmaker for 20 with a congressman, a well-spaced Washington Nationals watch party for 25 in the ballroom, and a smattering of journalists hard at work or enjoying a juicy steak in the Reliable Source.

The Club's iconic two-floor clubhouse reopened for members and events more than a month ago under Washington DC's phase 2 reopening procedures and is now offering a variety of in-person events in addition to the raft of impressive online news and professional events that the Club and its Journalism Institute have organized during these difficult months of the COVID19 pandemic.

As members of the Club's House Team, we've both spent time there recently. While we understand that venturing out is a personal decision for everyone, we can attest to the Club's [safety procedures](#), the comfort of the familiar surroundings and the incredibly warm welcome from the staff. Under the leadership of Executive Director **Bill McCarren** and the Club's board of governors, the Club has taken extraordinary steps to ensure members' safety and comfort.

With the number of members and guests coming to the Club significantly below the cap of 50 at a time, there's still more than enough room to spread out. The [online form for reserving a time to come to the Club](#) is extremely easy to use, and allows members to specify the amount of time (up to four hours between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m.) and whether they plan to eat in the Reliable Source during the visit. It also has a full list of the protocols.

Arrival at the National Press Building and the escort up to the 13<sup>th</sup> floor is a seamless process. Only two people at a time are allowed in the elevators, and high-tech temperature scanners on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor help screen for potential symptoms, in addition to a few standard questions. Visitors must wear masks inside the building, except when they are eating or drinking. Signs throughout remind visitors of safety precautions, touchless hand sanitizer stations stand sentry throughout both floors, and air purifiers hum quietly.

In the Reliable Source bar and grill, **Mesfin Mekonen** looks like the happiest man alive when he greets members, with his team serving delicious breakfasts free to members until 10 a.m., as well as lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. and dinner from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. The number of tables in the Reliable Source has been reduced to allow for the proper physical distancing, and the staff takes precautions such as serving meals rather than buffet style and disinfecting

each table after every use, etc. The service and food are still excellent. **Anne Pizzoli** at the bar is thrilled to see customers. Though she can't seat guests at the bar yet for understandable reasons under the phase 2 opening rules, she happily prepares drinks for guests in the dining room or the lounge.

A few members use the Truman Lounge for small (3-4) person meetings -- a perfect spot in downtown DC to strategize and a conveniently located base for coverage. Similarly, in addition to every other desk available on "Freelance Alley" (to create physical distance), a half dozen or so new desks around the mezzanine provide more work space, again appropriately distanced. The library desks and computers aren't yet open, but the Club's wi-fi is excellent for use with your laptop or smartphone.

Clients can reserve the Club again for private events -- with guests wearing masks and seating placed at the appropriate distance, as when New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo conducted a briefing following a meeting at the White House with President Donald Trump. The Broadcast Operations Center on the fourth floor is open for use by reservation.

Coming to downtown Washington also is a useful reminder of the effect of this pandemic on business and the life of a city's core, and the Club is a good base for exploring that impact. The Metro may be safer than a lot of people might think, considering few are using it, masks are required, and a SmartTrip card means there's no reason to touch anything other than sitting. The latest [studies](#), in fact, show little risk of transmission on mass transit systems in Europe and Asia, when protocols such as mask requirements are in place.

The bottom line: the Club's staff has done a tremendous job of placing safety first and ensuring that the facility is available for members whenever you're ready to venture out.



U.S. Rep. Eric Swalwell, D-Calif., at a socially distanced newsmaker in the Club ballroom. Photo by Alan Kotok

The National Press Club is located at  
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