**A quick reference guide for talking to the press**

**Before the conversation starts**

Be sure you are clear with the reporter how you would like to be attributed. Ask the reporter to define what they understand the terms below to mean to be sure you’re on the same page. Make them repeat back to you which one you’ve agreed on before you tell them anything.

**During the conversation**

If you are “on the record” for the conversation and ask to go “off the record” for any part, **before you start your off the record comment(s) be sure the reporter has agreed to go off the record.** You simply saying “off the record” is not enough; the reporter could still quote you.

**Basic Terminology**

**Off the record**

* Usage: The reporter can’t use the info or quotes in any way in a story. The conversation is ONLY to tell the reporter information they may want to pursue or source elsewhere.
* Attribution to you: None.
* How it’s helpful to reporters: It’s good to know sometimes that something is happening. Or they are already covering a topic or person, and you can provide a tip that they may be unaware of to pursue there. But they wouldn’t know to ask about it if they didn’t hear it so it’s helpful. Here you can say: “You can/should ask about this but don’t say my name, and you can’t use it from me.”

**On background**

* Usage: Everything you say can be quoted or included to inform the story.
* Attribution to you: Attributed to you by a non-specific role/title without using your name. This is where you see “senior White House aide” or “person familiar” in a story. It’s broad enough that it could be multiple people, but specific enough that people understand that the person would reasonably have the information being shared.
* How it’s helpful to reporters: They can use the information but not use the source’s name to add credibility to the reporting. To use background information in a story, they generally need two sources.

**On the record**

* Usage: Everything you say can be directly quoted to you.
* Attribution to you: They use your name, and possibly your current and/or former title.
* How it’s helpful to reporters: This option is always preferred, but reporters understand why people don’t want this. They generally only need one source here. To quote from or review documents, emails, etc. they can source them as “viewed by WSJ/NYT/WaPo” — they don’t have to source them specifically or have them in hand as long as they see the whole thing.