# Winston Marshall urges Trump administration to consider asylum for UK free speech cases



Former Mumford & Sons banjoist Winston Marshall has sparked surprise in the White House by urging the Trump administration to consider granting asylum to British citizens prosecuted for exercising free speech. The exchange occurred during a White House press briefing on Monday, where Marshall directly questioned Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt about the possibility of asylum for those in the UK facing legal repercussions for speech-related acts.

Marshall’s intervention comes amid ongoing controversy in the United Kingdom concerning restrictions on free speech, particularly in relation to protests near abortion clinics. The case of Adam Smith-Connor, arrested in 2023 for refusing to leave a designated safe zone around an abortion clinic, has drawn considerable attention. Marshall described a broader climate of restrictions, stating, “we have had a quarter of a million people issued non-hate crime incidents” tied to free speech since then. He elaborated, “As we speak, there are people in prison for quite literally reposting memes. We have extensive prison sentences for tweets, social media posts and general free speech issues.”

Pressed by Marshall, Leavitt responded that she had not previously heard asylum proposed to the president on these grounds but expressed willingness to raise the matter with the administration’s National Security team, calling the question “a very good one.” The exchange gained viral attention online, where many expressed surprise that the query came from a former Grammy Award-winning musician.

Winston Marshall’s political engagement intensified following his departure from Mumford & Sons in 2021. He attributed his exit to backlash after publicly supporting journalist Andy Ngo’s book *Unmasked*, which led to accusations of endorsing extremist views. In a 2021 column reflecting on the event, Marshall noted, “I failed to foresee that my commenting on a book critical of the far-left could be interpreted as approval of the equally abhorrent far-right.” Now hosting a political podcast, *The Winston Marshall Show*, he actively advocates for issues related to free speech and censorship.

The discussion about free speech in the UK was amplified earlier this year by US Vice President JD Vance during his speech at the Munich Security Conference in Germany. Vance highlighted the Smith-Connor case, describing it as evidence that “free speech is in retreat” in Britain. He recounted how Smith-Connor, a physiotherapist and army veteran, was found guilty under British buffer zone laws for silently praying near an abortion clinic, without obstructing anyone.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer dismissed such criticisms, affirming, “Well, we've had free speech for a very, very long time in the United Kingdom and it will last for a very, very long time.” He stressed pride in the nation’s free speech tradition and rejected foreign interference.

However, concerns about free speech have continued to surface. The US State Department recently expressed monitoring of the prosecution of Livia Tossici-Bolt, an anti-abortion campaigner charged after displaying a sign outside an abortion clinic. Meanwhile, UK Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch has warned that free speech is “at risk” in Britain, emphasising the importance of protecting individuals’ rights to express themselves on contentious issues such as abortion.

These tensions over free speech may have implications for the UK’s ambitions to secure a free trade deal with the United States. Reports have emerged suggesting that free speech concerns have entered trade negotiations, with unnamed sources indicating there could be “no free trade without free speech.” Downing Street, however, has downplayed the suggestion that the issues are influencing talks as the UK seeks a transatlantic economic agreement amid the continuation of President Trump’s global tariff strategies.

Winston Marshall’s call at the White House highlights the evolving discourse on free speech between the UK and the US, and the role that public figures and political leaders continue to play in this debate.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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