# Former Mumford & Sons banjoist asks White House about asylum for British free speech cases



Former Mumford & Sons banjoist Winston Marshall surprised White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt during a press briefing on Monday by raising a provocative question concerning free speech and asylum for British citizens. Marshall called on the Trump administration to consider granting asylum in the United States to British individuals who had been prosecuted for exercising their free speech rights.

The exchange occurred inside the White House Briefing Room, where Marshall highlighted the challenges faced by citizens in the UK regarding free speech. He referenced the case of Adam Smith-Connor, arrested in 2023 after refusing to leave a designated safe zone around an abortion clinic—areas established to protect vulnerable women. Since then, Marshall claimed, "we have had a quarter of a million people issued non-hate crime incidents" related to free speech restrictions.

Marshall emphasised, "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," before posing the question directly to Leavitt: "Would the Trump administration consider asylum for British citizens in such a situation?"

Leavitt, appearing taken aback, described it as "a very good one" and stated, "I have not heard that proposed to the president nor have I spoken to him about that idea, but I certainly can talk to our National Security team and see if it's something the administration would entertain."

Winston Marshall, who left Mumford & Sons in 2021, has become increasingly involved in political discourse since his departure. Originally launching a podcast called Marshall Matters for The Spectator, owned by his father, Sir Paul Marshall, he now hosts The Winston Marshall Show. His political involvement heightened following his removal from the band, which he attributed to backlash for sharing support for Andy Ngo’s book *Unmasked* and speaking against COVID-19 lockdowns.

Marshall’s question has attracted attention online, with some commentators noting the unusual nature of a former Grammy Award-winning musician raising such a politically charged question at a White House press event. A social media user remarked: "There's something about the former banjoist of Mumford & Sons whose dad owns a propaganda channel asking about political asylum over non-existent laws at a White House press conference that feels like it really sums up our era."

The backdrop to this discussion includes Vice President JD Vance’s controversial remarks at the Munich Security Conference in January, where he claimed that free speech was "in retreat" in the UK. Vance cited Adam Smith-Connor’s case as an example, describing how the man was prosecuted for silently praying within 50 metres of an abortion clinic, violating new buffer zone laws that prohibit certain activities intended to influence decisions within 200 metres of such facilities. Vance stated:

"A little over two years ago, the British government charged Adam Smith-Connor, a 51-year-old physiotherapist and an Army veteran, with the heinous crime of standing 50 meters from an abortion clinic and silently praying for three minutes, not obstructing anyone, not interacting with anyone, just silently praying on his own."

He added that Smith-Connor was sentenced to pay thousands of pounds in legal costs.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer rebuked Vance’s comments shortly after, 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." Starmer emphasised his pride in the country's tradition of free speech.

The US State Department has also expressed concern about freedom of expression in the UK, citing the prosecution of anti-abortion campaigner Livia Tossici-Bolt. Tossici-Bolt was prosecuted after displaying a sign reading "Here to talk if you want" outside an abortion clinic. Tory leader Kemi Badenoch echoed these concerns earlier this month, warning that free speech is "at risk" in Britain, arguing strongly against persecuting individuals for expressing their views on abortion.

The ongoing dispute over free speech is reportedly complicating the UK's attempts to negotiate a free trade deal with the United States. According to the Telegraph, a source familiar with the negotiations indicated there should be "no free trade without free speech." However, Downing Street has downplayed the suggestion that free speech issues are a significant obstacle in ongoing transatlantic economic discussions aimed at offsetting the impact of global tariffs under President Trump’s administration.

This complex interplay of free speech, legal prosecutions, and international diplomacy continues to unfold, with figures such as Winston Marshall bringing further attention to the topic in high-profile political arenas.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://bsky.app/profile/adamjschwarz.bsky.social/post/3lnvd6k4kck2a> - Mentions Winston Marshall's interaction with Karoline Leavitt and references his history of advocating free speech, aligning with his White House question about asylum.
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFmjgbdNNgw> - Features Marshall discussing populism and free speech, corroborating his focus on First Amendment issues and government-censorship narratives.
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIiVPc3FwA8> - Discusses UK free speech controversies involving immigration and censorship, supporting claims of prosecutions over speech-related incidents.
4. <https://feeds.acast.com/public/shows/winstonmarshall> - Links to Marshall's podcast, corroborating his post-Mumford & Sons political engagement and free speech advocacy.
5. <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v47/n04/peter-geoghegan/making-media-great-again> - Details Winston Marshall's family ties to media entities and his involvement in free speech debates, including his father's role.
6. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFmjgbdNNgw> - Reiterates Marshall's alignment with Trump-era free speech arguments, relevant to his asylum proposal for UK citizens.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14657935/Winston-Marshall-Mumford-Sons-Brits-speech-asylum-US.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data