

Obama aide reveals how the groupie president fawned over celebs and his wife 'fat-butt Michelle' and favored extra tight gay sweatpants

In *West Winging It: An Un-presidential Memoir*, senior writer Pat Cunnane tells how Obama's White House became 'Hollywood East' for its frequent celebrity guests. "You never knew who you would run into on the way to the mess, or who was waiting for you to exit the restroom...we had no shortage of high profile guests at the White House," he writes. Cunnane reveals Obama's obsession with golf was a nightmare for press wranglers who had to block them from nabbing a photo of him playing rounds. "A duffed chip or missed putt could draw out trite, stretched analogies to a failed policy or flawed rollout from a bored press pool," Cunnane writes. Obama also caused a frenzy when he left the White House for a coffee run without the press pool. The former press wrangler told how the president's style improved over time since at times he wore 'unusually tight sweatpants and sandals with white socks'.
By Caroline Howe For DailyMail.com

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Like the Kennedys, the Obamas often rubbed elbows with celebrities who loved to visit what came to be known as 'Hollywood East' during the president's eight-year term.

Bruce Springsteen, **George Clooney**, and **Leonardo DiCaprio** were among many stars who came to the White House to hang out with the 'cool' president.

When **Pope Francis** came to Washington and the White House in September 2015, and zipped across the South Lawn in a black Fiat, **Oprah Winfrey**, Bill Gates and Michael Jordan also graced the president's home.

The White House was a celebrity hot spot during his eight years in office.

Comedian Jerry Seinfeld came to do a segment of his show, *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee*, with **Obama** and the two drove on White House grounds in a 'killer' 1963 Corvette Stingray in silver blue. It won the show an Academy Award nomination and smashed all viewership records.

Seinfeld told Obama he was the coolest guy ever to hold this office.

Writer Pat Cunnane signed on as a White House press staffer in February 2011 and stepped inside the presidential bubble of the world's biggest superstar.

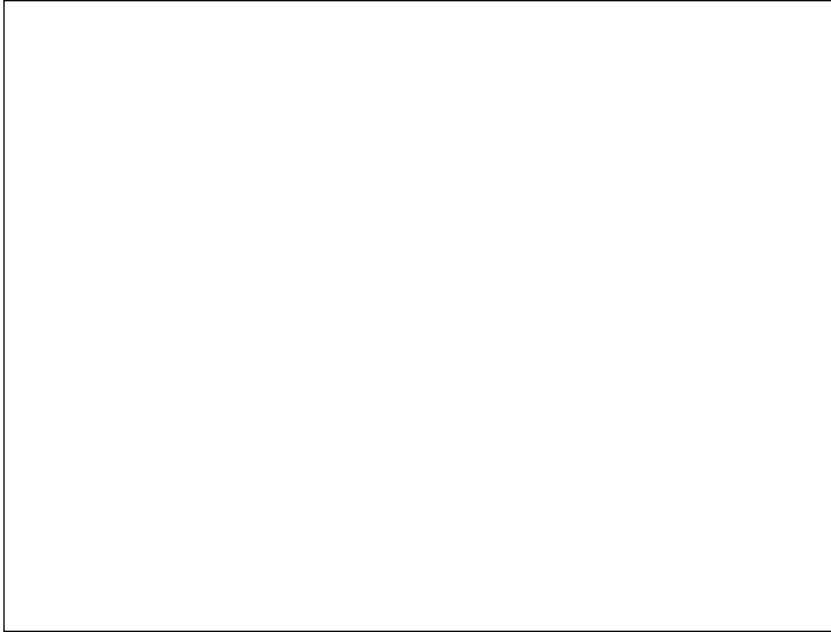
With the frequently visiting stars, Cunnane coined the phrase, 'Got that sun in your eyes,' which means "'behaving different due to proximity to someone or something deemed cool," something that happened more than I could have imagined', he writes in his upcoming book, **West Winging It: An Un-presidential Memoir**, published by Gallery Books.

The 'coolest' president: Senior writer Pat Cunnane reveals how he witnessed 'countless moments of nonsense' and the 'glorious mystery' in Obama's West Wing

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Pat Cunnane (pictured outside the White House with Conan O'Brien) served as a press wrangler and later, senior writer for President Obama

'You never knew who you would run into on the way to the mess, or who was waiting for you to exit the restroom...we had no shortage of high profile guests at the White House.'

When Cunnane moved up from being what was called a press wrangler, sorting through the latest press stories, to become senior writer - responsible for scripting speeches, interviews, even jokes and accompanying Obama on trips - it became his dream job as he got to know the president as a funnyman, a nerd, a voracious reader, orator, thinker and family man.

It was a fascinating gig to be working in the West Wing, 'where the stress is high, days are long and everything's accelerated in the foxhole.'

'Even more than remarkable to me than tagging along on Air Force One, I was one of the White House staffers tasked with telling the president's story,' he writes.

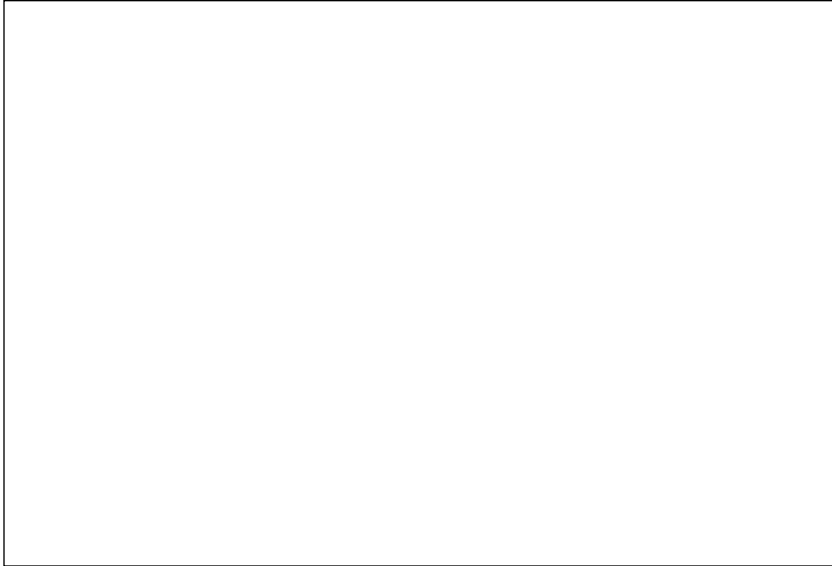
But there were some hair-raising moments.

One of them occurred when he nearly accidentally killed First Dogs Sunny & Bo.

The two Portuguese water dogs came foraging through the press room looking for any leftover food or treats – and there were always plenty.

The pups were on their own and on move when the first couple was out of the White House. A groundskeeper named Dale was responsible for keeping an eye on them.

But this one time the dogs got away from Dale and headed straight for what they knew as a lucrative food source: the press quarters.



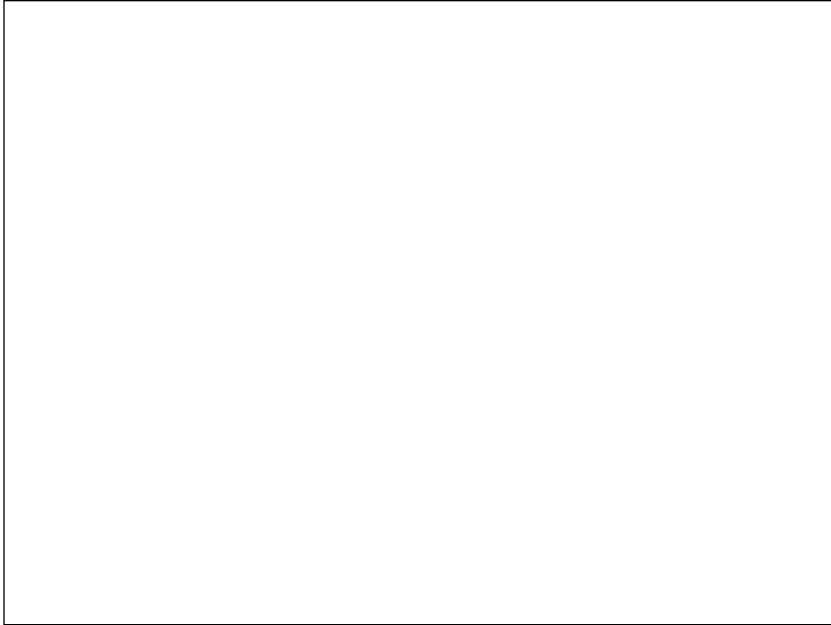
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Hollywood East: Obama became a favorite in Hollywood and had a slew of celebrity guests throughout both of his terms. Above he is pictured with Jay-Z and Bruce Springsteen at an election campaign in Ohio



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A well-known Obama fan and environmental activist Leonardo DiCaprio attended a climate change discussion at the White House in 2016



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Pope Francis was one of the big-name figures to visit Obama at the White House. Above they are pictured at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland in 2015

Suddenly Bo was sniffing out the remnants of a 'Chocolate Freedom', an extravagant chocolate lava cake with soft-serve vanilla ice cream in a cup.

'I lunged for Bo the instant I saw him getting too close to the "Freedom," determined not to be the staffer responsible for killing America's First Dog,' Cunnane writes.

But foraging for food was not the only trouble they got into. Obama had told Time Magazine that Sunny had a habit of defecating near the Lincoln Bedroom.

Cunnane's role allowed him to witness 'countless moments of nonsense' and the 'glorious mystery' of the West Wing.

He even reveals how on his first day, he accidentally slammed the door on Vice President Joe Biden's face.

Feeling lost in the West Wing, he watched as Biden approached down a narrow hall so he had turned to get out of his way and exited out a large wooden door to the lobby letting it close abruptly.

Biden had been speaking behind him, but assuming it couldn't possibly be directed at him, he had let the door slam - right in the vice president's face.

'What? Am I talking to a door here?' he heard Biden say.

Over time, Cunnane got over the mortifying incident and the two often eventually ended up at a urinal next to each other in the West Wing basement lobby bathroom – 'a four-stall, two-urinal affair,' where he learned one of Biden's favorite sayings – 'Nobody is better than you, but you're better than nobody.'

Over the next five years, he would get to know the 44th president as a funnyman, a nerd, a voracious reader, orator, thinker and a family man.

From his vantage point in the West Wing as Obama's senior writer, the author learned that 'Privacy doesn't exist in the West Wing. People talk. People write books. Secrets don't stay secrets for long'.

The candid memoir about life in Obama's West Wing will be released on April 17, 2018

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One such secret that quickly got out was the president's obsession with golf. He played it throughout his two annual vacations to Hawaii and Martha's Vineyard where press photos could make it look like the President was on the links 24 hours a day.

Back at the White House, when Obama escaped to play his now favorite sport, the company press line was that 'he just enjoyed the chance to take a walk outside'.

'But what also is true is that the man had become somewhat obsessed with the game'.

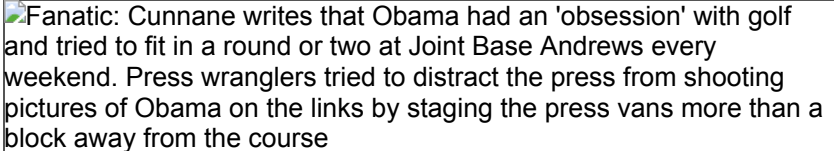
On weekends Obama would try to fit in a round or two at Joint Base Andrews, JBA, the US Air Force facility that housed the president's planes.

This was a nightmare for the author as a press wrangler at the beginning of his White House years when wranglers were responsible for what the White House press pool of reporters, camera crew and photographers did or didn't see on their travels everywhere with the president.

That included foreign trips or to the golf course for a five-hour round.

Press wranglers tried to distract the press from shooting pictures of Obama on the links by staging the press vans more than a block away from the course.

'A duffed chip or missed putt could draw out trite, stretched analogies to a failed policy or flawed rollout from a bored press pool', the author writes.

A screenshot of a social media post with a light blue background. The text reads: "Fanatic: Cunnane writes that Obama had an 'obsession' with golf and tried to fit in a round or two at Joint Base Andrews every weekend. Press wranglers tried to distract the press from shooting pictures of Obama on the links by staging the press vans more than a block away from the course".

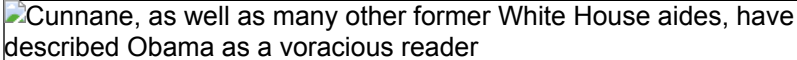


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A screenshot of a social media post with a light blue background. The text reads: "Obama reads briefing material in 2012".

Cunnane, as well as many other former White House aides, have described Obama as a voracious reader

If the president hit one straight down the middle, the press would write that maybe he was playing too much and had too much practice time to get so good.

In 2014, neither the Secret Service nor press were thrilled when Obama decided to make a break from his approved path around the White House and took a coffee break at Dunkin' Donuts - or so they thought.

They had panicked that 'The Bear is loose', and made a run for the restaurant until they spotted a big commotion up Pennsylvania Avenue.

Obama had gone to Starbucks without his press pool and pandemonium had ensued when they arrived.

'C'mon guys, give me some space', the president asked, holding a coffee cup.

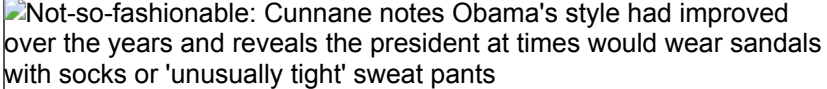
'The poor guy just wanted to take a walk, but it was a reminder that he couldn't,' Cunnane writes.

Responsible for covering the president continuously shooting stills, video, recording history, the press pool is recording history and any photo of the president could be the last. They are living historians of the White House.

'They move like a pack, and when it's just the men, they verge on the vulgar'.

One older photographer had proven to be vulgar, out of frustration over too much time on the road pre-Obama days.

'He was said to have opened a competitor's luggage during an overseas trip and relieved himself on the contents of the bag.'





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Not-so-fashionable: Cunnane notes Obama's style had improved over the years and reveals the president at times would wear sandals with socks or 'unusually tight' sweat pants

Cunnane worked in the Upper Press offices for five plus years, 30 feet from the Oval office and reporters were free to enter those offices.

That was a buffer zone between POTUS and the press and was typically six to ten feet deep.

It was built into every presidential event and provided photographers with the 'hero shot': a from-below portrait of the speaker.

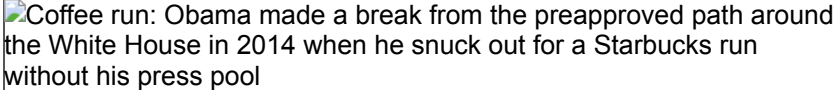
It was a zone that Trump didn't let reporters into during his presidential campaign 'because he was not comfortable with the way his chin looked when photographed from below.'

Cunnane learned that he wasn't just working for a 'rhetorically gifted robot' when Obama burst into the Upper Press office one day and asked, 'What in the hell is going on?'

He was 'pi**ed' and wanted to vent about the ongoing payroll tax cut debate -- a proposed tax increase on individuals making more than \$1 million annually while Republicans preferred spending cuts for the rich.

'I was learning that Obama was something more complicated and much more impressive'.

Another eruption occurred when the president was furious when the Washington Post Style section ran a story titled 'Michelle Obama's Posterior Again the Subject of a Public Rant'.

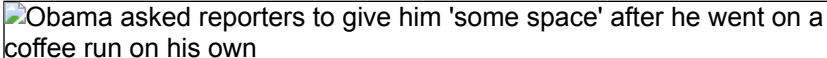




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Coffee run: Obama made a break from the preapproved path around the White House in 2014 when he snuck out for a Starbucks run without his press pool





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Obama asked reporters to give him 'some space' after he went on a coffee run on his own

'Totally disrespectful', Obama steamed.

A high school football coach in Alabama had been secretly recorded saying, 'Fat butt Michelle Obama.'

Coach Bob Grisham had been caught while ranting about the first lady's efforts to promote low-calorie school lunches and the federal government meddling in local business. He later apologized --- after being suspended.

Reporters who came to the White House daily often brought treats and food -- cupcakes, donuts, rum cake, cookies and chocolates.

The Russian reporter brought vodka and one time showed up with a bottle with Obama's face on it.


One wrangler asked if it should be swept for listening devices.

'Where would they hide a bug in vodka?' one reporter who'd worked for Time magazine in Russia laughingly asked.

'This was a few years before we realized just how active the Russians aimed to be at our highest levels of government', writes the author.

Liquor was always free flowing at the White House that brewed its own beer, a honey ale and honey porter.

It was considered delicious and stock was passed out to local lowans while Obama was campaigning for his second term.

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During the marathon of holiday receptions, the infamous boozy eggnog got the better of guests and staffers. The recipe called for melting ice cream before pouring in multiple types of alcohol.


The Office of Presidential Correspondence, which began during the Eisenhower administration, read through all incoming letters and emails to learn the voice of the people.

One of the Cunnane's jobs was to include ten letters every night in the president's briefing book so the president was made aware of what mattered most to the American people.

The most common words to come out of the daily correspondence: Guns, police, abortion, and help.

It took 50 staffers, dozens of interns and hundreds of volunteers to read those letters and emails.

When Clinton was president, women sent in their panties.

 The former aide told how he could've nearly killed First Dogs Bo (pictured) after he found the pup sniffing out the remnants of a chocolate lava cake

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'We've got another pair!' someone would call out. 'The amount of sexual stuff that came in for Bill Clinton cannot be overstated', Cunnane learned.

Foreign trips were grueling – but the elegance of Air Force One made it less so.

On long flights, the author noticed that Obama was becoming more stylish with more shirt buttons undone.

But he wasn't always so fashionable in the early years.

On overnight flights, his flight-casual gear might be 'an athletic zip-up sweatshirt (okay), unusually tight sweatpants (not okay) and sandals – with white socks (really not okay),' Cunnane writes.

'It was a disconcerting vision of our very cool POTUS. But it seemed to keep him loose, because he kept it real on those flights'.

On one flight late in the administration and on learning of 'Trump's plans, or lack thereof, to adequately address cybersecurity in the wake of the 2016 elections, 'That sh*t cray', Obama said, coming out of the conference room on AF1.

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Cunnane did countless domestic trips with the president and nearly 20 foreign visits – travelling on AF1.

On board the luxurious plane, O read briefing books, played spades with trusted aides, scrolled through his IPAD, played the game Words with friends, read the New York Times and books. He voraciously read books.

After the G20 international economic summit in 2013 in St. Petersburg where global leaders debated what to do in the wake of a chemical attack in Syria and came to no agreement, President Putin told Obama, 'You've got some big b*lls'.

'It was O's confidence wedded to his genuine humility that I witnessed connect in place after place, person after person, of every geography and station in life'.

When administrations changed and Cunnane's assignment ended, he knew he would miss those days working in the White House.

He didn't view it as humbling. 'It is not'.

'It fortifies your focus and lifts your purpose' and 'there is no bigger ego boost than strolling through security, past the press, and toward the West Wing, feeling like maybe you belong'.

Even 'countless moments of nonsense didn't replace the glorious mystery of the place --- they resided alongside my highest hopes and dreams'.

[West Winging It: An Un-Presidential Memoir is available for pre-order at Amazon](#)

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