

From: The Washington Post <email@e.washingtonpost.com>
To: Adams, ChaneyChaneyAdams@gov.sc.gov
Date: 1/26/2017 12:00:49 PM
Subject: Federal Insider: Gingrich joins Trump's war on media 'mortal enemies'

Gingrich joins Trump's war on media 'mortal enemies'

By Joe Davidson

Former House speaker Newt Gingrich (right) greets Donald Trump at a campaign rally at the Sharonville Convention Center in Cincinnati in July. (Reuters/Aaron P. Bernstein)

Few things seem to energize politicians like bad press.

On his first full day in office, President Trump excoriated journalists as “among the most dishonest human beings on Earth.”

Two days later, former House speaker Newt Gingrich jumped into the fray like the second half of a wrestling tag team. The American people could be the losers in this fight.

Journalists are “the propaganda of the left, which we used to refer to as the news media,” [Gingrich told the Heritage Foundation](#) on Monday. He called Sunday's [Meet the Press](#) “entirely a propagandistic effort on behalf of the nut cake, left-wing worldview.”

That was the show where White House counselor Kellyanne Conway attempted to explain away White House press secretary Sean Spicer's bogus claim that the size of Trump's inauguration crowd was the largest ever, including Barack Obama's.

“Sean Spicer, our press secretary, gave alternative facts,” Conway said.

Incredulous, host Chuck Todd responded: “Look, alternative facts are not facts. They're falsehoods.”

There was propaganda on Meet the Press, but it wasn't from Todd. His

defense of the truth, however, apparently was enough to earn him Gingrich's reprobation.

Just call the media propagandists, Gingrich told the conservative crowd, instead of "pretending these are reasonable people ... no, they are our opponents. They, they're people who despise us. That's a fact."

So, Trump and his battlefield lieutenant have declared a war on reporters, one akin to the everlasting fight against terrorism.

Gingrich said Trump's team should expect "hostility and dishonesty ... every day for eight years. It will never go away. It will never end These people are their mortal enemies."

Trump called it "a running war with the media," in his speech at CIA headquarters, a place where real war is taken seriously.

All this talk about war and mortal enemies places recent efforts to restrict information from federal agencies in a broader, more threatening context.

This week, my colleagues [Juliet Eilperin](#) and [Brady Dennis](#) revealed administration efforts to restrict information to the public in a story that said the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is among departments that "now have formal policies restricting what they should convey to the public about their work."

They reported on an EPA memo instructing communications staffers that for the time being "no press releases will be going out to external audiences, no social media will be going out ... no blog messages ... no new content can be placed on any website."

Last week Lisa Rein reported that Interior Department [Twitter accounts were temporarily shut down](#) on Inauguration Day after the retweeting of messages including one about the smaller size of Trump's crowd.

Accusing the media of lying about the turnout at his swearing-in, Trump, known for his thick ego and thin skin, issued this ominous prediction: “I think they’re going to pay a big price.”

Although the media are an easy target for Trump and Gingrich, it is the public that will suffer from this one-sided war. Democracy thrives on information from government, particularly information about government’s foibles and politicians’ wrongdoings.

“In a democracy, journalists are a built-in check against power. Both Trump and Gingrich in their comments are trying to discredit the one check on their power that they cannot control,” said Kelly McBride, vice president of the Poynter Institute, a journalism training center in St. Petersburg, Fla. “It’s scary because it suggests that they don’t believe in the balance of power that is inherent in democracy. Trump is the most powerful man on the planet right now. And he clearly doesn’t welcome or appreciate anyone who might scrutinize him. Gingrich seems to be in lockstep.”

This war also targets federal public affairs staffers. Even in good times, they put the best face on bad situations. But career public information officers know they ultimately serve and owe allegiance to the public and not to any politician.

“[G]overnment communicators, at all levels of the administration, must be allowed to practice their profession, to serve the public interest by being the timely, credible and trusted source of factual information about government,” said a statement from the National Association of Government Communicators. “The new administration needs to understand that good government requires good communication. Good communication is guided by ethics, like not knowingly or intentionally withholding information that is publicly releasable, taking swift and effective action to prevent the public release of false or misleading information, and above all else never lying to the media

because in government communication, the truth is sacred.”

Someone show Spicer that last line.

Federal employees should know they are protected against retaliation if management improperly imposes gag orders.

The [Office of Special Counsel](#) (OSC) issued a news release Wednesday reminding officials that the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act’s anti gag provision supersedes nondisclosure agreements and policies.

“For example, one prohibited personnel practice explicitly shields employees for blowing the whistle on any effort to ‘distort, misrepresent, suppress’ or otherwise censor any government ‘research, analysis, or technical information’ that the employee reasonably believes” could pose a threat to public safety or violates the law or regulations, the OSC said.

Perhaps this will comfort federal climate-change experts.

“The federal government must foster an environment where employee disclosures are welcomed,” added Special Counsel Carolyn Lerner. “This makes our government work better.”

Read more:

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