



Written by [Patrick J. Buchanan](#) on November 16, 2018

Trump Raises the Stakes With CNN

Last week, the White House revoked the press pass of CNN's chief White House correspondent, Jim Acosta, and denied him access to the building.

CNN responded by filing suit in federal court against the president.

Acosta's First and Fifth Amendment rights had been violated, said CNN. The demand: Acosta's press pass must be returned immediately and his White House press privileges restored.



"If left unchallenged," CNN warned, "the actions of the White House would create a dangerous chilling effect for any journalist who covers our elected officials." A dozen news organizations, including *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, are filing amicus briefs on CNN's behalf.

On Thursday, the Trump administration raised the stakes.

Justice Department lawyer James Burnham declared in court: "If the president wants to exclude all reporters from the White House grounds, he clearly has the authority to do that."

After all, whose house is it if not the "President's House," the home of Donald Trump as long as he serves in the office to which he was elected by the American people?

The West Wing contains the Oval Office and the offices of senior staff. As for the West Wing briefing room, it was built by President Richard Nixon in 1969, when White House passes were regarded as privileges.

When did they become press rights or press entitlements?

Is Trump obligated to provide access to whomever CNN chooses to represent the network in the West Wing, even if the individual assigned routinely baits the press secretary and bashes the president?

Whence comes this obligation on the president?

White House aides can be fired, forced to surrender their passes and be escorted out of the building.

Whence comes the immunity of White House correspondents?

The First Amendment guarantees CNN reporters and anchors the right to say what they wish about Trump. It does not entitle Acosta to a front-row seat in the White House briefing room or the right to grill the president at East Room press conferences.

Why was he expelled from the White House?

Says press secretary Sarah Sanders, "The First Amendment is not served when a single reporter, of more than 150 present, attempts to monopolize the floor."

Acosta baits the president, argues, refuses to yield the floor, manifests a hostility to Trump and trashes him regularly on-air.



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Such conduct has made him a champion to Trump haters. But to others, it makes him a biased witness to the Trump presidency who has no legal or constitutional claim to a chair in the West Wing briefing room.

When this writer entered the White House in January 1969, a reporter who had traveled in the 1968 campaign came by to explain that I had to understand that he was now part of “the adversary press.”

What we had done to be declared an adversary, I do not know. I had assumed that the opposition party would become the adversaries of a Nixon White House.

But if the press declares itself an adversary of the White House and if it acts as an adversary — as it has a First Amendment right to do — such members of the media are no more entitled to the run of the West Wing than would be a member of Congress who regularly attacks the president.

Theodore White wrote in *The Making of the President 1972* that the real enemies of Nixon’s White House were not Democrats such as Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield and House Speaker John McCormack but CBS News, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*.

This holds true for Trump. If the media are not “the enemy of the people,” the major media are certainly — and proudly — the enemy of Trump.

Trump’s most visible and persistent adversaries are not Nancy Pelosi or Chuck Schumer. And it is Trump’s attacks on CNN and “fake news” that bring his loyalists to their feet. With his use of Twitter, Trump has found a way around an overwhelmingly hostile media.

Former FBI Director Robert Mueller gets a favorable press, as he is seen by the media as the instrument of their deliverance from Trump.

But should the special counsel bring in a report that says, “Donald Trump did not collude with Russia in the 2016 election, and we could find no obstruction of justice in how he dealt with our investigation,” Mueller’s indulgent press would turn on him overnight.

CNN says that if Trump succeeds in pulling Acosta’s press pass, it could have a “chilling” effect on other White House correspondents.

But if it has a chilling effect on journalists who relish confronting the president and reaping the cheers, publicity and benefits that go with being a leader of the adversary press, why is that a problem?

The White House should set down rules of conduct for reporters in the briefing room, and if reporters repeatedly violate them, that should cost them their chairs and, in cases like Acosta’s, their credentials.

This confrontation is healthy, and the republic will survive if the press loses this fight, which the press itself picked.

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