



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on August 29, 2019

O'Rourke Campaign Ejects Breitbart Reporter From Event at Black College

The presidential campaign of former Texas Democratic Congressman Beto O'Rourke (shown) ejected a Breitbart News reporter from an event at a historically black college Tuesday, claiming students would not have "felt comfortable and safe" discussing their experiences in the reporter's presence.



Breitbart reporter Joel Pollak was waiting to cover an O'Rourke event at Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina, Tuesday when a campus police officer asked him to gather his belongings and leave the room in which the event was about to take place.

At that point, [according to Pollak](#), an O'Rourke campaign staffer who gave his name only as "Steven" told Pollak he was being ejected because he had been "disruptive" at past campaign events. "'Steven' threatened this reporter, saying that I could either leave voluntarily or be 'officially uninvited' from campus, suggesting arrest," recalled Pollak, who said he complied with the request.

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CNN's Caroline Kenny, having witnessed part of the incident, [corroborated](#) much of Pollak's account. "About 10 minutes before the event started, a police officer walked in with an advance staffer and they asked him to come with them," she said. "He never came back in the room."

Pollak said he had only covered two previous O'Rourke events and was not "disruptive" at either. During a Monday press gaggle in Charleston, South Carolina, he had what he termed a "civil exchange" with O'Rourke over the candidate's "false or misleading comments" regarding President Donald Trump's remarks on neo-Nazis and white supremacists.

Pollak's ejection was ironic in light of the fact that O'Rourke has argued vociferously in favor of press freedom. Asked during a town hall last year what he would do to protect press freedom, O'Rourke said, "If we don't have a free press, if we cannot make informed decisions at the ballot box, if we can't hold people like me accountable, and make sure that we're held honest to the promises that we made, to the job that we're performing in these positions of public trust, we'll lose the essence of our democracy." He later [posted video of the exchange on Twitter](#) with the comment "The press is not the enemy of the people but the best defense against tyranny. We need to vigorously defend the freedom of the press. It's essential for our democracy."

O'Rourke took a drubbing for booting Pollak from the Benedict College event. *New York Times* reporter Matthew Rosenberg, for example, [tweeted](#): "No matter what you think of Breitbart, this is wrong. No campaign should be deciding who gets to cover its events. An event is either open to the press, or it is not. Freedom of the press is not a conditional right — it applies to every American regardless of their views."



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The criticism eventually prompted the O'Rourke campaign to address the incident. "Beto for America believes in the right to a free press and works hard to ensure the campaign reflects that," O'Rourke's national press secretary, Aleigha Cavalier, said in a statement Wednesday. But she went on to charge that "Breitbart News walks the line between being news and a perpetrator of hate speech."

"Given this particular Breitbart employee's previous hateful reporting and the sensitivity of the topics being discussed with students at [a historically black college], a campaign staffer made the call to ask him to leave to ensure that the students attending the event felt comfortable and safe while sharing their experiences as young people of color."

A Breitbart spokesperson [responded](#) with this statement: "The false accusation that Breitbart is racist, or that its award-winning reporter — an Orthodox Jew, married to a black woman who serves in the military — is either racist or would make anyone at a black university uncomfortable is absurd. The irony of Mr. O'Rourke — who has stated himself that he is the beneficiary of 'white privilege' — purporting to decide for black students who should be banned from events that are open to the press, or what they should feel, is not lost on us."

Thanks to the uproar over his ejection, Pollak need not worry about being asked to leave any upcoming O'Rourke campaign events. "There will be no restricted access to future events," Cavalier told CNN — but only after the news channel asked her twice.

Photo of Beto O'Rourke: AP Images



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