



Exclusive to OpEd News:

OpEdNews Op Eds 7/3/2024 at 9:43 PM EDT H2'ed 7/3/24

What happens to the media if Trump wins second term?



Robert Weiner



Kailynn Bannon

By Robert Weiner and Kailynn Bannon

What will happen to the media if Trump wins? Journalists must prepare for the "vindictive" vendetta he said he would foster. What can journalists do and how should they cover him?

Trump caused a lot of damage to the reputation of journalism while president. He criticized countless news outlets for "fake news" and belittled journalists. He is still at it.

Trump has threatened freedom of the press: he vowed to seek "retribution" on the news media. In 2019, he threatened a Time magazine journalist with jail time for taking a photo. He mocked journalists with disabilities, told reporters to take off their masks at the height of the pandemic, and condoned acts of violence against journalists. He also banned reporters from the White House and took legal action against several publications. To this day, at most rallies, he points to and condemns the "fake news in the back."

He even called on the government to make cable channel MSNBC "pay for their illegal political activity," claiming their criticism is a "24-hour hit job" and "the world's biggest political contribution to the Radical Left Democrats." He has made targeted attacks against MSNBC's Lawrence O'Donnell, tweeting that maybe he should sue him.

"He wants to put MSNBC on trial for treason so that he can execute us," Maddow said.

It's not just MSNBC. Variety Magazine reports that among the outlets Trump singled out and derided as "fake news" are the New York Times, NBC News, ABC, CBS, CNN and the Washington Post.

Much as he pre-judged the Central Park Five for murder, he kept posting that "Morning Joe" host, Joe Scarborough, had responsibility for the death of a congressional staffer. Trump shoots from the hip and misses - but as president he would have the power to force investigations and possibly even prosecutions.

A couple of months after assuming office, Trump accused the press of being an "enemy of the American people." While calling mainstream media "fake news" is irresponsible, calling the press "enemies of the people" is something much more unsettling.

Soviet government leaders, such as Hitler and Stalin, often used the phrase "enemy of the people" to delegitimize the people's trust in opposing parties.

However, the distress that the Trump administration induced was good for business. A study showed that the anxiety and anger experienced during Trump's presidency led to an increase in profit in the media. The more uncertainty there is in the world, the more people turn to the news.

Just because the press got more attention and profit doesn't mean that people trusted them more, or that newsworthy content was being published.

Journalist McKay Coppins, staff writer at The Atlantic and the White House 2019 Aldo Beckman Award winner, spoke on how damaging it is when publications focus on every outlandish thing that comes out of Trump's verbal and posted statements.

"It's really important that we not have our business models depend on that being the case. Because if they are, all of us are going to be pushed to insert artificial drama into every story we do, and that's not good for anyone," Coppins said.

Many news outlets turned to profit-seeking coverage - abandoning their standards by leaning into clickbait and irrelevant stories.

Journalists have an advantage this election with Trump no longer regularly posting on X, formerly Twitter. While he often used Twitter to go above the media, he seems to not plan on utilizing that platform anymore. Trump has other plans for his social media use.

He surprisingly joined TikTok, which he unsuccessfully attempted to ban while president. He claimed that this change of heart was because Facebook, which he deemed as "the true enemy of the people," would grow in size if TikTok gets banned.

This flipped stance on TikTok conveniently occurred right after Trump met with billionaire Jeffrey Yass, a major donor to the conservative Club for Growth who holds a 15 percent stake in TikTok's Chinese parent company ByteDance.

Another way the media would change with another Trump term is the elimination of many diversity, equity and inclusion positions, likely including the recent hiring of a director of Hispanic media and director of Black media. Trump announced to a packed stadium that he would "terminate every diversity, equity and inclusion program across the entire federal government."

While news publications may have had an increase in financial stability during the Trump administration, many journalists worry about the media being attacked and diminished going forward. Trump already shared insight on how he would handle the media in a second term.

"I say up front, openly and proudly, that when I WIN the Presidency of the United States, they and others of the LameStream Media will be thoroughly scrutinized for their knowingly dishonest and corrupt coverage of people, things, and events," Trump posted on Truth Social last September.

It doesn't seem as if Trump's stance on the press will be changing anytime soon. This poses a threat to a free press and leads to wider profit-driven coverage.

Many Democratic officials, activists and watchdog groups are already starting preparations for another Trump administration. Taking actions such as keeping a supply of mifepristone pills and hiring auditors.

Journalists need to stay informed and start preparing for the inevitable backlashes that will occur if Trump is made president again. It is vital that publications learn libel laws and how they apply if Trump continues his attacks.

Learning the processes to sue and protect the rights of the press will ensure that publications are ready to fight back. President or not, the Trump team members that help him have no right to violate the laws that apply to all American citizens, as Steve Bannon, Paul Manafort, Alan Weussman, and Michael Cohen among others, learned as they wound up behind bars. They learned the hard way. Even if the Supreme Court is chicken on federal criminal laws against Trump, state and civil laws and defamation suits apply.

The media cannot keep treating everything that Trump says as news. Instead of bashing him for misinformation, journalists should explain to the American people and provide the full truth.

Robert Weiner was a spokesman in the Clinton and George W. Bush White Houses. He was communications director for 4-Star Gen. Barry McCaffrey, Cong. Conyers (as spokesman for the House Gov Ops and Oversight Committee), Charles Rangel, senior staff for Claude Pepper, Ed Koch, and political aide to Ted Kennedy.

Kailynn Bannon is a policy analyst, research coordinator and Op-Ed writer at Robert Weiner Associates and Solutions for Change. She was the opinions editor and staff writer for The Southern, the Florida Southern College newspaper.