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OUR VIEWS

An independent press

By punishing reporter, the White House assaults the First Amendment

When President Donald Trump hosted Elon Musk in the Oval Office for an executive order signing last week, it was certainly newsworthy. The tech billionaire fielded questions from the assembled media about his ongoing infiltration of sensitive information throughout the federal government, an effort that remains cloaked in secrecy.

Absent from that gathering was a reporter from the Associated Press, who was barred by White House staff from covering the presidential event. The reason? The AP has thus far declined to rename the Gulf of Mexico in its reporting, even though the president ordered that body of water be known as the “Gulf of America.”

Prohibiting reporters from covering official presidential events because they won’t comply with administration edicts violates the basic tenets of the First Amendment, which protects media outlets from being punished by the government for their editorial choices. It smacks of the authoritarianism common to Vladimir Putin’s Russia or Viktor Orbán’s Hungary and should find no purchase in the United States.

As he began his second term, Trump wasted no time before tackling the most pressing issue facing this country: changing the name of the Gulf of Mexico. The president signed an executive order hours after his inauguration directing the secretary of the Interior to pursue renaming it the “Gulf of America.”

While Trump operated within the scope of his office to issue the order and provide direction to a Cabinet member, his power



Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum holds a map and looks on as President Donald Trump speaks to reporters about his proclamation renaming the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America, aboard Air Force One on Feb. 9. **PETE MAROVICH/THE NEW YORK TIMES**

to change the name of any geographic feature is limited. He can update the Geographic Names Information System to reflect the new designation, but as the director of the International Hydrographic Organization told the New York Times, “There is no formal international agreement or protocol in place for naming maritime areas.”

Mexico, for one, won’t accept it. “For us and for the whole world it is still the Gulf of Mexico,” President Claudia Sheinbaum of Mexico said on Jan. 21. And it’s

more likely than not that the gulf will now have multiple names used depending on context, much like the Persian Gulf is also known as the Arabian Gulf and the Sea of Japan is also called the East Sea.

As an independent global media organization, the AP serves an international audience and is deliberate in how it does so. It has historically reflected naming disputes with care and caution, seeking to remain neutral to avoid accusations of bias.

The AP issued guidance about the gulf

on Jan. 23, writing, “The Gulf of Mexico has carried that name for more than 400 years. Associated Press will refer to it by its original name while acknowledging the new name Trump has chosen. As a global news agency that disseminates news around the world, the AP must ensure that place names and geography are easily recognizable to all audiences.”

That’s prudent for now. The AP often reviews and debates its guidance for news organizations, so it’s possible that it will adopt the “Gulf of America” nomenclature at some point. But for now, it’s probably better to stick with what most people know to avoid confusion.

That wasn’t sufficient for a sensitive president who demands capitulation. And he made his displeasure known by prohibiting the AP White House reporter from an official event in the Oval Office. The AP has subsequently been barred from covering any presidential events.

“It is alarming that the Trump administration would punish AP for its independent journalism,” AP Executive Editor Julie Pace said in a Feb. 11 statement. “Limiting our access to the Oval Office based on the content of AP’s speech not only severely impedes the public’s access to independent news, it plainly violates the First Amendment.”

Punitive punishment isn’t likely to change how the AP covers the president for its millions of readers at home and abroad, but it does illustrate the petty vindictiveness of the most powerful man in the world. The media’s independence is guaranteed by the Constitution and the president cannot infringe on that right, even when his feelings are hurt.

OTHER VIEWS

Trump’s actions on offshore wind energy won’t help consumers

By **Yaël Ossowski**
Guest columnist

President Donald Trump was relentless on the campaign trail in his commitment to unleash American prosperity with an energy revolution. From the oil wells of the American West to the gas pipelines of the Midwest, Trump said his administration will reverse the anti-energy policies of the Biden White House by finally letting energy explorers and entrepreneurs do what they do best. But Trump’s energy revolution may have limits after he signed an executive order freezing permits for new offshore wind projects.

Issued on his first day in office, the order halts all future wind energy leases on the offshore continental shelf and denies renewals for existing projects. It also requires the Department of the Interior to review wind energy leases nationwide, including inland.

Trump’s distaste for wind energy and its environmental effects are well-known (“they drive the whales crazy”), but this campaign against a functional source of electricity is baffling.

The current energy output of commercial wind projects off America’s shore is just 174 megawatts, enough to power about 50,000 homes, produced off the coasts of Rhode Island, Virginia and New York.

But the total capacity could be as high as 80 gigawatts on windier days according to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, meaning that at least half of this could still easily travel along transmission lines to power substations on our coasts.

If we were to conservatively estimate offshore wind capacity at 25%, this would still be enough to power all households in Virginia and Maryland for one year. If this amount of electricity can be produced by coastal areas and the companies can still make a profit doing it, why shouldn’t they be free to do so?

As usual, Trump’s criticism of this industry is half-right and half-wrong.

It is true that the Biden administration directed a lot of federal subsidies toward wind projects. Trump’s executive order calls for an assessment of the “economic

costs associated with the intermittent generation of electricity and the effect of subsidies” because the industry received a large boost in President Joe Biden’s Inflation Reduction Act.

In the Department of Government Efficiency era, arguing for taxpayer subsidies toward specific energy sources is a losing battle. But kicking wind energy to the curb is a mistake.

The total amount of electricity generated by wind power in the United States was 12%. If our offshore capabilities in say, Virginia, matched those we have in the fields of Texas, which has as many as 160,000 wind turbines, that would make a noticeable difference to energy consumers.

Wind energy should be allowed to operate and compete in the free market for consumer dollars. If wind fails, let it fail. The same reasoning should be applied to all types of energy.

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Trump’s executive order represents a sort of cognitive dissonance.

By questioning the contributions of wind energy, the president relies on studies mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to make this determination. These are the same reports that

have stunted the construction of energy projects and even stymied entrepreneur Elon Musk’s wishes to stage rocket launches in certain areas.

For Trump to use NEPA as justification for hostility to offshore wind, while at the same time unraveling NEPA in an executive order 24 hours later, is major league mixed messaging.

Wind energy was no doubt propped by Trump’s predecessor, but that fact shouldn’t deter Trump from using every available tool to deliver lower energy prices to consumers.

Energy abundance means shunning the degrowth mentality that got us here. It means endorsing every type of energy, wind, solar, oil or nuclear, that can freely compete for our dollars. Trump should get favoritism out of the energy markets.

Yaël Ossowski writes about energy policy and is deputy director of the Consumer Choice Center in Washington, DC.



YOUR VIEWS

School testing

Re “American competitiveness hinges of R&D investment” (Other Views, Feb. 2): Joann DiGennaro, co-founder of the Center for Excellence in Education, writes, “During a recent ‘State of the Science address, National Academies of Science (NAS) President Marcia McNutt acknowledged that the U.S. is losing the race for global STEM leadership.’”

The author doesn’t explain the reason for this, but there is a possible explanation. Scientific research requires the ability to do research, evaluate information, develop original ideas, work independently and solve problems. At one time these were components of good teaching, but the requirement that all students pass the state standardized tests made it impossible for teachers to allow students to move at their own pace or choose topics of their interest. The state curriculum requires all students at each grade level to learn the same information at the same time. If enough students don’t pass the required test, the school will “fail.” There is very little time left for any other instruction.

Memorizing correct answers does not lead to exploration, innovation and problem solving — the basic foundations of scientific research. Outstanding teachers know how to stimulate students’ curiosity so that they are motivated to learn independently. Students can discover that it’s possible for a question to have more than one right answer. They can learn how to think.

When we allow teachers the freedom to encourage students to explore and investigate information, students will be developing the skills that are required for innovation and scientific discovery.

— *Lois Winter, Yorktown*

Flood the zone

As the Trump administration “floods the zone,” it’s hard to know which cruel, illegal and/or unconstitutional action will be the most consequential for Americans, and most deserving of our outrage. Of course this is exactly the point: to sow

enough chaos and fear that the response can only be diluted and ineffectual.

The playbook for all of these actions was spelled out in “Project 2025,” and yet President Donald Trump managed to distance himself from it by declaring “I know nothing about it,” convincingly enough to win votes from those who would be most harmed by its blatant anti-worker, anti-civil rights, anti-immigrant, anti-American prescriptions. What too many voters failed to realize is that the spoils of Project 2025 will go to the billionaires and their corporate coffers at the expense of the rest of us. The issue is not the need for reforms in government; American laws and policies have always been subject to congressional and judicial review. But this administration is taking a wrecking ball to the very constitutional procedures and protections that all Americans take for granted.

The Democrats in Congress must now abandon “whack-a-mole,” and urgently mount a more forceful defense of the very institutions that actually made America great. And any Republican, elected or otherwise, with the courage to buck this campaign of cruelty needs to stand and be counted. Put country over party. If we remain mired in the disunity that fuels fires of hatred and distrust in government, we will yield our collective power to those who gleefully dismantle the foundations of our democracy.

— *Elizabeth Wilkins, Yorktown*

Humpty dumpty

Threads that long served to bind organs of state and allies are being unraveled. All the king’s horses and all the king’s men couldn’t put Humpty Dumpty together again. Eight years after the British referendum, a majority of the British public now believe it was a mistake but the party in power has no political appetite to reverse it, despite nostalgia for the European Union. Likewise, the United States will regret how foolishly we allowed our threads to loosen and tangle.

— *Roger Gosden, Williamsburg*

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