

We're journalists, not the enemy

Sigh. If only President Donald Trump denounced neo-Nazis as passionately and sincerely as he castigates journalists.

What could be an easier task than distancing oneself from Nazis or violent white supremacists? Yet Trump manages to make it infinitely complicated — and then get distracted by self-pity and excoriate reporters for committing journalism. The key strain of his sulfurous speech in Phoenix on Tuesday was an extended attack on “dishonest” reporters (including at “the failing New York Times”).

Look, we in journalism deserve to have our feet held to the fire. We make mistakes all the time, and too often we are superficial, sensationalist, unfair, defensive or diverted by shiny objects. Critics are right that we in the national media are often out of touch with working-class America, and distressingly often, we are lap dogs instead of watchdogs.

Yet for all our failings, journalism remains an indispensable constraint on power. Trump has systematically tried to delegitimize the institutions that hold him accountable — courts, prosecutors, investigators, the media — and that's the context for we collectively provide monitoring that outrages him.

The New York Times and The Washington Post have separately tallied Trump's lies, with The Post calculating that he has now made more than 1,000 misleading statements since assuming the presidency. That's a grueling pace of almost five a day, and it is accelerating (at the six-month mark, it was 4.6 a day). This prevarication proliferation is an indication that John F. Kelly is unable to rein in Trump, and that the problem was not Steve Bannon but the president himself.

Trump's caricature of journalists as dishonest is hypocritical, and it insults the courage and professionalism of my colleagues who sometimes risk their lives trying to get a story.

I've lost reporter and photographer friends in war zones all over the world, and have had other friends kidnapped and tortured. When Trump galvanizes crowds against reporters in the room, I worry that we may lose journalists in the line of duty not only in places like Syria but also right here at home. Trump will get people hurt.

I also worry that Trump is buoying the repressive instincts of dictators around the world. Since Trump's election, I've been denied entry by Venezuela, Congo, South Sudan and Yemen, an unusual number of countries — and I wonder if foreign leaders believe that it is now easier to deny access to

troublesome American journalists now that they are reviled by their own president.

Aside from Trump's desire to reduce scrutiny and accountability, there are other theories for why Trump finds it so difficult to denounce Nazis and other racists without getting diverted into rants about journalists.

One is that he has always had a soft spot for racists, ever since as a young real estate developer he was sued by a Republican Department of Justice for systematically discriminating against blacks. Over the years he has also been quoted as saying that “laziness is a trait in blacks,” declined to distance himself from the Ku Klux Klan and periodically retweeted posts by neo-Nazis (including one from an account called @WhiteGenocideTM with a photo of the founder of the American Nazi Party).

Another theory (these are not mutually exclusive) is that Trump is simply a thin-skinned narcissist who shares the white supremacists' sense of victimization. It was striking that in Tuesday's speech in Phoenix, he seemed to believe that the biggest victim in Charlottesville was not Heather Heyer, who was murdered, but himself.

Yet another possibility, which previously was mostly whispered but is increasingly openly discussed even by members of Congress, is that our president is mentally unstable.

The causes of Trump's bizarre behavior may be difficult to disentangle. But I hope that you, as members of the public, will understand what is at stake in his assault on the media. This is not about reporters and the mistakes we make, but about institutional checks on the presidency.

We appreciate, not always gracefully enough, the public's efforts to keep us honest. We also are grateful for the outpouring of subscriptions to news organizations, and the support for organizations like the Committee to Protect Journalists. The irony has been that the more Trump vilifies the media, the more the public has rallied around us — and, finally, this is helping us gain a better business model. Since Trump was elected, the stock price of the Times Co. has risen by almost two-thirds. Thank you for your assistance, Mr. President!

This is an extraordinary moment in our nation's history, for we are enduring an epic struggle over the principles on which our country was founded. These include the idea that a flawed free press is an essential institutional check on flawed leaders.

So may I humbly suggest that when a megalomaniacal leader howls and shrieks at critics, that is when institutional checks on that leader become a bulwark of democracy.

Palliative care in Telluride

Telluride has had a difficult history when it comes to residents living out their golden years in our small town. We are all familiar with the stories of people who have lived here for 40-plus years and are forced to leave their

long-time homes, friends, loved ones and our beautiful valley to move to larger communities for health reasons. This often happens because end-of-life care, home-based medical services and in-home support services needed by the elderly or ailing are sorely lacking in Telluride and San Miguel County. That is changing thanks to efforts by Tri-County Health Network (TCHNetwork) and the Telluride Regional Medical Center in launching a comprehensive Palliative Support Services Program.

Palliative care focuses on improving the symptoms, dignity, quality of life and comprehensive health (body, mind and soul) for people with a serious disease or injury, as well as providing support to caregivers. According to the World Health Organization, palliative care uses early identification and assessment to treat

pain and other problems. Palliative care is “applicable early in the course of illness and in conjunction with other therapies that are intended to prolong life.”

A common misconception is that palliative care is the same as hospice care. However, hospice care is specifically defined as end-of-life care with the goal of providing peace, comfort and dignity to people with six months or less of life expectancy. Palliative care, on the other hand, can be applied throughout the course of treatment for an illness or injury, from initial diagnosis through the transition to hospice care.

Dr. Sharon Grundy of the Telluride Medical Center has been a pivotal figure in providing the medical care necessary to keep people in their homes during their most challenging time of life. She and Lynn Borup, executive director of TCHNetwork, have worked ceaselessly to put together a dedicated team of partners, including physicians from the Telluride Medical Center, local nurses, 23 community volunteers and PASCO Home Health based in Cortez. PASCO hired two local nurses — Emily McGough and

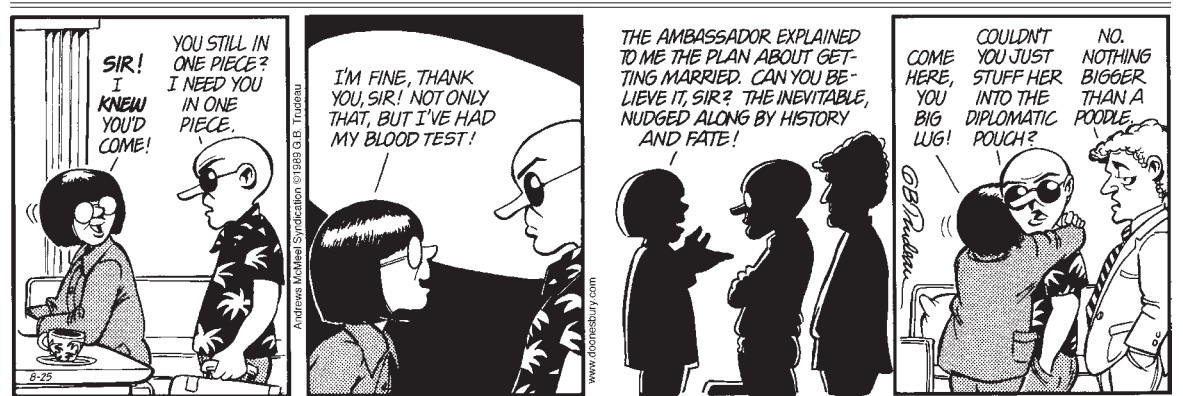
myself — to offer palliative care and home health services in the Telluride area. An advisory board comprised of local professionals and passionate community members also has been put in place to help guide TCHNetwork's Palliative Support Services Program.

According to Ben Marshall, TCHNetwork's Palliative Support Services Coordinator, the Palliative Support Services Program is working to identify, build, and support a continuum of resources that address the barriers to care experienced by our aging and chronically ill community members and their caregivers.

“TCHNetwork hopes to create a system that empowers community members to live in their homes for as long as they wish, regardless of their health,” Marshall said. “We recognize that this must be a community effort and we are extremely grateful to all of our partners for helping to build and foster comprehensive palliative support services.”

For inquiries about our services or if you are interested in volunteering for TCHNetwork's Palliative Support Services Program, please contact Marshall at 970-708-4458 or send an email to coord-pc@tchnetwork.org.

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GUEST COMMENTARY



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A more secretive White House

President Trump's White House appears to be even less transparent than it seemed a few months ago. According to a new lawsuit from the advocacy group Public Citizen, the Trump administration is refusing to release information on even a subset of visitors to the White House grounds. This is likely illegal and certainly wrong.

Public Citizen says it has asked repeatedly that the Secret Service turn over records on who has visited four executive agencies on the White House grounds, including the Office of Management and Budget, which crunches numbers for the president on a wide range of policies, and the Council on Environmental Quality, another important policy department.

But, according to Public Citizen's attorney, the Trump administration rebuffed the organization's requests, citing legal and logistical barriers. Among them: It would be difficult to sort out who visited which agency and, therefore, which records need

to be released and which do not. Here's a solution: Go back to releasing all visitor logs, except when doing so would endanger national security.

Public Citizen's suit comes on the heels of another, broader complaint from a separate collection of advocacy groups, charging that all White House visitor records should be, as a matter of course, public, including records on visits to Mar-a-Lago and other places where Mr. Trump routinely sets up shop. This was more or less the approach the Obama administration took, after facing similar lawsuits. The Trump administration nevertheless said in April that an open policy would present “grave national security risks and privacy concerns.” At that time, the White House said the Trump administration would, when asked, still release visitor records relating to agencies not technically under the executive office of the president, agencies that are almost certainly subject to the Freedom of Information Act. Now, in turning down Public

Citizen's requests, the administration appears to be defying even that policy.

Public Citizen argues that more transparency would reveal that Trump administration staffers are taking a lot of meetings with industry groups. This would not be surprising. Even so, knowing exactly whose counsel the president's staff is taking would nevertheless advance public understanding of its leaders and how those leaders are making policy.

Reasonable public scrutiny, meanwhile, can have a beneficial effect on how staffers behave, particularly when higher-ups are not watching. Former Obama administration officials say that the previous visitor records policy discouraged staff from taking meetings and cultivating associations they probably should not have. Concerns about harm to national security did not bear out.

It should not fall on the courts to enforce basic transparency from the public's elected leaders. But with this administration, the judiciary may have an essential role to play.