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From: Morning Media
Sent: Mon 12/4/2017 10:37:04 AM
Subject: Morning Media: Trump's 'Flynn' tweet speaks for itself — Brian Ross suspended — Billy Bush speaks — 'Fake news' attacks go global — Remembering Les Whitten

By Michael Calderone | 12/04/2017 05:35 AM EDT

"THE TWEET SPEAKS FOR ITSELF." White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders and her predecessor, Sean Spicer, have provided that explanation to reporters a number of times in response to some of President Trump's outrageous or unsubstantiated claims on Twitter. But after Trump admitted Saturday in a tweet that he knew former national security adviser Michael Flynn had lied to the FBI at the time Trump had allegedly urged former FBI director James Comey to back off his investigation of Flynn - a revelation that could help make the case for obstruction of justice - the press is told that the president's tweets may not be his voice after all.

- **The Washington Post and CBS News**, citing unnamed sources, reported Saturday that lawyer John Dowd actually wrote the tweet (which was notably composed in the first person and ended with an exclamation point, a typically Trumpian flourish). Such reports were understandably met with skepticism. "I'm genuinely curious why many news orgs are taking at face value the claim that Dowd wrote that tweet," Talking Points Memo editor Josh Marshall tweeted, noting it was written "in Trump's tone."

- **On Sunday, Dowd told several news outlets**, beginning with ABC News, that he had drafted the tweet. On NBC's "Meet the Press," Chuck Todd said Dowd confirmed that he'd written the tweet and said it was the only time he'd composed one in the president's name. Dowd told CNN he'd drafted the tweet but believed that White House social media director Dan Scavino had posted it - and declined to answer questions about whether Trump reviewed it before it was posted. "The tweet, and this explanation, are just plain suspicious and weird," wrote Axios' Mike Allen after also speaking to Dowd.

- **So much of the news cycle these days** is propelled by Trump's Twitter feed because, as president of the United States, his words carry enormous weight regardless of the forum - whether uttered at a rally, in a prepared speech, or in an early-morning tweetstorm. But after a potentially self-incriminating tweet, the standard explanation was dropped and Trump was conveniently cut out of the equation. Trump's tweeted statements can have repercussions worldwide, yet, if this explanation is believed he may not have a role in writing some of them or even aware of the contents before someone hits send. But regardless of the supposed backstory, the Flynn tweet, like others, was a statement in the president's voice, on his account, has been liked or retweeted more than 100,000 times, and notably has not been taken down. Some might say it speaks for itself.

Good morning and welcome to Morning Media. Please send tips to mcalderone@politico.com and @mlcalderone. Jason Schwartz ([@JasonSchwartz](https://twitter.com/@JasonSchwartz)) and Daniel Lippman ([@dlippman](https://twitter.com/@dlippman)) contributed to the newsletter. [Archives](#). [Subscribe](#).

"YES, DONALD TRUMP, YOU SAID THAT," wrote Billy Bush in a New York Times op-ed Sunday night, a day before he sits down with CBS's Stephen Colbert for his first late-night appearance since the infamous "Access Hollywood" tape broke in October 2016.

- **"President Trump is currently indulging** in some revisionist history, reportedly telling allies, including at least one United States senator, that the voice on the tape is not his. This has hit a raw nerve in me," Bush writes. "I can only imagine how it has reopened the wounds of the women who came forward with their stories about him, and did not receive enough attention. This country is currently trying to reconcile itself to years of power abuse and sexual misconduct. Its leader is wantonly poking the bear."

- **Bush recalled another off-camera conversation** with Trump after calling out the then-"Apprentice" star for inflating his ratings: "People will just believe you. You just tell them and they believe you," he said.

BRIAN ROSS SUSPENDED: ABC News suspended veteran ABC News reporter Brian Ross for four weeks on Saturday and apologized for his inaccurate bombshell a day earlier that Trump, as a candidate, directed Flynn to make contact with the Russians.

- **"We deeply regret and apologize** for the serious error we made yesterday," the network said in a statement. "The reporting conveyed by Brian Ross during the special report had not been fully vetted through our editorial standards process." Still, ABC News - which faced criticism for initially issuing a "clarification" to Ross's report rather than a correction - didn't explain in detail how Ross got on air with such an explosive story based on a single source and who else was involved in the editing process.

- **"My job is to hold people accountable** and that's why I agree with being held accountable myself," Ross tweeted. The episode brings more scrutiny on Ross, who has broken many stories but also has a history of high-profile errors. Ross reported in 2001 that there may be link between late Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and anthrax attacks in the United States, which there wasn't, and he suggested in 2012 that the mass shooter in Aurora, Colorado was connected to the Tea Party.

- **Ross's major blunder also gives ammunition** to the president, who is already quick to dismiss critical and credible news stories as "fake news." "People who lost money when the Stock Market went down 350 points based on the False and Dishonest reporting of Brian Ross of @ABC News (he has been suspended), should consider hiring a lawyer and suing ABC for the damages this bad reporting has caused - many millions of dollars!" the president tweeted.

PRESIDENT'S "FAKE NEWS" ATTACKS GO GLOBAL. Authoritarians have taken note of Trump's strategy for delegitimizing the news media. The government of Myanmar, accused of ethnically cleansing the Rohingya, a Muslim minority group, is now employing the go-to insult. "There is no such thing as Rohingya," said U Kyaw San Hla, an officer in Rakhine's state security ministry, according to the New York Times. "It is fake news."

- **"The gravity of an American president's favorite catch phrase** being used to justify ethnic

cleansing will probably be lost in the noise this weekend, but it shouldn't be," tweeted journalist Sulome Anderson. "The truth has a big, red target on it now." CNN's Jake Tapper noted it's "just the latest example of despots and authoritarians using President Trump's attacks on the press/truth to pretend they are not engaging in horrors."

- **Press freedom advocates** have long feared that Trump's anti-press rhetoric would spread globally and make it more difficult to fight repression and censorship abroad. Following Trump's attack the previous weekend on CNN International as "fake" news, a spokesman for the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs tweeted that CNN's coverage on his country was "deplorable." A small Libyan media outlet later cited the swipe at CNN International to dismiss the network's remarkable report on that country's migrant slave trade.

AN UPSIDE?: The New Yorker's Steve Coll also expresses concern in a new piece that Trump's "fake news" jab "inevitably gives cover to foreign despots who threaten reporters in order to protect their own power." But on the plus side, he writes: "Fortunately, in attacking the media Trump has in many ways strengthened it. This year, the Times, the Washington Post, and many other independent, professional enterprises have reminded the country why the Founders enshrined a free press as a defense against abusive power. Among other achievements, the media's coverage of Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation has made transparent the seriousness of its findings so far, and constrained the President's transparent desire to interfere."

TODAY: The Poynter Journalism Ethics Summit in Washington aims to strengthen "political journalism and public trust in a polarized era" and will feature veteran political reporters, White House correspondents, ethics experts, academics, and top editors from the Washington Post and POLITICO.

HOW SMALL-TOWN ALABAMA PAPER TAKING STAND ON ROY MOORE: The Washington Post's Margaret Sullivan editor visits Troy Moore Opelika-Auburn News. "This 12,000-circulation paper, which has won numerous statewide awards for excellence, has not ignored the issue," she writes. "Instead, mindful of how people feel throughout conservative Lee County (named after the Confederate general), it has taken a cautious approach. Turner wrote an editorial last month calling for Moore to step down as a candidate, concluding that he could not be an effective senator. Its headline, too, was bold: "It's time for Roy Moore to step aside for Alabama."

AS MEDIA HOLIDAY PARTY SEASON KICKS OFF, newsroom managers will surely be thinking about how to handle the often boozy affairs in light of the ongoing sexual harassment scandal. Vox Media, which has been site of one sexual misconduct case and has covered those at other news outlets, will be limiting staffers to two drinks a piece instead of providing an open bar.

REEVALUATING 2016 AFTER SEXUAL HARASSMENT SCANDALS: I mentioned Thursday that the presidential election coverage of now-disgraced media men, like Matt Lauer, Bill O'Reilly Charlie Rose, Mark Halperin, Michael Oreskes, and Leon Wieseltier, is prompting a second look at how such influential voices have shaped politics. Here are two more perspectives:

- **"A look back through the work** of some powerful men accused of harassment reveals double standards, demeaning stereotypes, and dismissive attitudes about sexual assault that, together, add up to a skewed portrayal of men and women, politics and power," Vox's Anna North wrote Friday. "Zeroing in on three men in particular - Lauer, Wieseltier, and Halperin - shows how that portrayal has the potential to influence many areas of news and American life, including and beyond the presidential election."

- **"A pervasive theme of all of these men's coverage** of Mrs. Clinton was that she was dishonest and unlikable," Jill Filipovic wrote in a New York Times op-ed, "The Men Who Cost Clinton the Election." "These recent harassment allegations suggest that perhaps the problem wasn't that Mrs. Clinton was untruthful or inherently hard to connect with, but that these particular men hold deep biases against women who seek power instead of sticking to acquiescent sex-object status."

- **In one sign on waning influence**, "60 Minutes" noticeably didn't mention now-former contributing correspondent Charlie Rose in its intro Sunday night for the show's 50th anniversary special.

SPEAKING OF 2016 MEDIA FAILURES, Donald Trump was able to break with four decades of precedent in not releasing his tax returns. Yes, journalists asked Trump on several occasions about releasing his tax returns, which he had promised to do before running, but he never faced sustained scrutiny. "For 15 months, he's punted on the tax return question in interviews and now, he appears to be trying to run out the clock," I wrote in May 2016. In the end, Trump did.

- **While it can be assumed Trump** and his family will do well under the Republican tax bill, which was hastily passed in the wee hours Saturday morning and expected to greatly benefit wealthy Americans, ProPublica's Alec MacGillis pointed out Friday that the public won't know exactly how. "The challenge for the media in covering Trump's smashing of norms on releasing tax returns was that it became 'old news,'" he wrote. "It all but vanished as a fact during the campaign. And here we are. About to pass a huge tax bill w/ no idea how it benefits the president. It's astonishing."

SOUND BITES

"The press tends to excoriate politicians' personal lies, because non-ideological, but too often fails to denote politicians' lies about public policy, because seen as ideological--even though the latter is far more objectively measured." [David Grann]

"Yes, there's obvious image-rehab happening here. But of the two ppl in that interview, one was fired in disgrace, the other was elected president." [Maggie Haberman]

"Hipster journo yawns at the President's lawyer's claim that he wrote that tweet confessing to obstruction of justice... Call me a rube, but some things should stay shocking." [Emily Nussbaum]

"Worth remembering right about now that @FoxNews never announced any disciplinary action for its retracted Seth Rich report." [[Oliver Darcy](#)]

THE PLAYBOOK POWER LIST: 18 TO WATCH IN 2018: The final Playbook Power List of the year highlights 18 politicians, activists and operatives across the country who are poised to make waves in 2018. From the anti-Trump "Resistance" on the left to the far right Bannomite wing trying to remake the GOP, keep an eye on these people over the next 12 months. [Click HERE](#) to find out who made the list.

- **HuffPost editor-in-chief Lydia Polgreen**, one of the 18 to watch, [told Playbook's Daniel Lippman](#) she wants her site's journalists to "fan across the country" to cover 2018 midterms. "To that end, earlier this year she and some other HuffPost journalists went on a bus tour called 'Listen to America.' They traveled to 26 cities over seven weeks, interviewing 1,500 people," wrote Lippman. "One thing we heard almost nothing about was Donald Trump," she told Playbook. "Lots of people wanted to talk about the problems in their own communities but didn't necessarily have a lot to say about the president."

JAMES O'KEEFE GROUP GOT \$1.7 MILLION FROM KOCH-BACKED CHARITY, The Washington Post [reports](#) : "The \$1.7 million came through Donors Trust, a type of tax-exempt charity called a donor-advised fund (DAF). Billionaire industrialists Charles and David Koch and other wealthy conservatives rely on Donors Trust and similar groups to finance numerous charities and other nonprofit organizations to promote libertarian, small-government and free-market policies and candidate." O'Keefe's group is known for trying to discredit and embarrass journalists, so the Koch connection is notable given the Koch brothers' investment fund last week backed the sale of magazine giant Time Inc.

REMEMBERING LES WHITTEN, an "investigative reporter arrested by FBI and spied on by CIA." From the [Washington Post obit](#) : "As [famed columnist Jack] Anderson's chief deputy - or 'senior ferret,' as New York Times journalist Tom Buckley once dubbed him - Mr. Whitten was handed assignments that included spying on the private lives of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and his top aide, Clyde Tolson... Just as often, however, Mr. Whitten and Anderson were on the receiving end of spying efforts, targeted by the Nixon administration for their critical coverage of the White House and leaks of government documents. The duo were trailed by the CIA, and at one point, Nixon associates G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt plotted to assassinate Anderson using LSD or what Liddy later described as 'Aspirin Roulette.'"

EXTRAS

- MSNBC's Joy Reid apologizes for past comments about gays on her old blog, [The Wrap reports](#).

- Jason Schwartz reports [on the scene](#) at Friday's White House media Christmas Party. More from the Times' [Michael Grynbaum](#).

- The staffs of "Megyn Kelly Today" and "Full Frontal with Samantha Bee" [had a "chilly](#)

encounter," according to New York magazine.

To view online:

<http://www.politico.com/media/newsletters/morning-media/2017/12/04/trumps-flynn-tweet-speaks-for-itself-brian-ross-suspended-fake-news-attacks-go-global-reassessing-2016-remembering-les-whitten-001392>

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