

To: Jackson, Ryan[jackson.ryan@epa.gov]
From: Morning Media
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Subject: Morning Media: DOJ urging CNN sale raises alarms -- Chuck Todd takes long view of press criticism -- Breitbart revisits 2016 -- Clinton guest-edits Teen Vogue -- Gorka joins Fox

By Michael Calderone | 11/09/2017 05:35 AM EDT

THE "FAKE NEWS" TAUNTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A SIDESHOW to a much bigger press freedom threat - that President Donald Trump, taking a page from authoritarian rulers, would try use government power to punish perceived adversaries in the news media.

-- **Trump has publicly mused** about opening up libel laws to make it easier to sue news organizations and recently suggested revoking broadcast licenses in response to unflattering coverage. A senior administration official told the New York Times in July that White House advisers had discussed the pending merger between CNN parent company Time Warner and AT&T as a way to gain leverage on the cable news channel.

-- **So it's alarming** that Trump's Justice Department is reportedly pressuring AT&T to divest either Turner Broadcasting (which includes CNN) or DirecTV in order to complete the merger, a demand widely perceived as stemming from the president's animus toward CNN. A source with direct knowledge of the talks told The Financial Times that "it's all about CNN." Network staffers also see political pressure, rather than legitimate antitrust concerns, behind the DOJ's move. "There's a contingent here that felt like, you have a litigious, vindictive commander in chief with the opportunity to take a poke at a network he believes covers him unfairly," one told Vanity Fair. "How did we think this is gonna end? It's outrageous."

-- **"The only reason you would divest CNN** would be to kowtow to the president because he doesn't like the coverage," one source told POLITICO. "It would send a chilling message to every news organization in the country."

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](#).

SOUND BITES

"The burden of proof is on the Justice Department to establish that there is no political interference in their Antitrust Division." [[Brian Schatz](#)]

"Like firing FBI director, legitimacy of forcing sale of CNN depends on motive. In both cases, the appearance of reprisal is strong." [[David Frum](#)]

"This is 101% Trump's personal vendetta against @CNN and authoritarianism. @GOP, are you really gonna let this stand?" [[Amy Siskind](#)]

"Russia feels closer than ever." [[Julia Ioffe](#)]

CHUCK TODD WOULD RATHER PEOPLE BE "HATE-WATCHING" Sunday stalwart "Meet the Press" than not watching at all. In today's fractured political climate, and amid broad distrust of the press, Todd says he finds such viewers "oddly engaged" even if "in a disapproving way." So getting them to still tune in every week, he said, provides "an opportunity to sort of win trust and credibility back."

-- **Regardless of who's watching**, Todd has reasons to be pleased with his audience these days, as "Meet the Press," which had been slumping in the ratings when he took the helm in 2014, ranked 1st this past Sunday in total viewers and has topped the key age 25-54 demographic for 16 weeks. It's also a celebratory time at "Meet the Press," which turned 70 this week, continuing its reign as the longest-running television show. Todd and company are being feted tonight at the Newseum, with the first-ever "Meet the Press" film festival kicking off Monday. In an interview with POLITICO, Todd suggested taking a long view when it comes to criticism of the press during a particularly heated political moment.

-- **"I view this as the Iraq war,"** Todd said. "We're going to be judged in five years how we covered this administration ... Day to day, plenty of journalists felt good, perhaps, in how they were covering the Iraq war. Five years later it looked horrendous, the decisions that were made." John Reiss, who serves as executive producer on "Meet the Press" and the Todd-hosted "MTP Daily," said they hear criticism from both supporters and detractors of the president and he echoed Todd's point that they'll "get the final score on how well we've done for a few years."

-- **In the near term**, both men said they hope Trump, who has yet to appear on "Meet the Press" since becoming president, will sit down for an interview. "We always feel we're about two or three weeks away," said Reiss, adding that he believes "in the end he wants to talk to us." Though Trump primarily retreats to friendly hosts on Fox, Todd said he believes the president "doesn't fear any interview" and has been more constrained by staff since entering the White House. "I think it's not an accident that during the campaign, when there were fewer people involved in deciding," he said, "when he was the decision-maker on what TV to do, he did a lot of TV."

WASHINGTON POST LAUNCHES 'COUNTERPOINT': The paper is rolling out a new module today that recommends an opinion piece with a different perspective than the one you're currently reading. "Our Opinions section provides robust coverage of topics from a variety of viewpoints, and we're excited to make the diversity of this content more prominent for our readers," editorial page editor Fred Hiatt said in a statement. "This is one way we can present a range of views that can help our audience be more informed and that hopefully will encourage dialogue."

CONSERVATIVE MEDIA QUIET ON VIRGINIA ELECTION: POLITICO's Jason Schwartz looks at how Fox News and conservative news sites seemed to downplay the Democratic gubernatorial win in Virginia, the most-watched 2017 election race. Breitbart editor-in-chief Alex Marlow said his site "did extremely robust coverage" on Tuesday night, but had always opted to lead Wednesday with a piece revisiting the 2016 election night. "We'd probably been working on that particular story for two or three days," he said. "We had planned for close

to a week, focusing on November the eighth and treating it as the high holy day in the America First movement that it is."

BREITBART LOOKS BACK: The populist, nationalist site departed from some other election-night oral histories by tapping its own staff's recollections. Several Breitbart staffers described how they - as opposed to many others in the media - believed Trump would win, citing the enthusiasm and energy on the campaign trail, and also fondly recalled the big night.

-- "At 2:30 a.m., the crowd was getting impatient while watching the Fox News reports live from Trump campaign party," recalled White House reporter Charlie Spiering. "Everyone in the room turned around and started shouting at the anchor, 'Call it! Call it! Call it!' Some saw on their phones that the Associated Press had called Pennsylvania for Trump, and they demanded that the cable networks deliver the verdict. At 2:40 a.m., Fox News made it official. The exhausted crowd roared when Trump went onstage with all of his campaign team. It was over."

FLASHBACK: I was also at Trump's victory party at the Hilton, amid the cheering supporters and blaring Fox News. This is what I wrote around 2:30 a.m. on Nov. 9, 2016: "Donald Trump's Victory Challenges The Power Of The Press."

FOX COMPLETES TRUMP TRANSFORMATION: Fox News hosts sometimes sparred with candidate Donald Trump. But hardcore supporter Laura Ingraham's ascension to her new 10 p.m. show last week marked a capstone in the yearlong remaking of the network in the Trump's image - and signaled that Fox fears increasing competition on the right, writes POLITICO's Jason Schwartz.

-- "I've read the stories about how the Murdochs have soured on Donald Trump, but you would not know it from their programming decisions," said Charlie Sykes, the longtime conservative radio host and MSNBC contributor. "It certainly reflects the business model of conservative media right now. Pro-Trump viewers want a safe space. They want a reliable outlet that will defend the president and attack his critics and Fox has apparently decided that it's going to give them that."

-- Even Chris Ruddy, the CEO of rival conservative platform Newsmax and a Trump ally, said he has been taken aback by Fox hosts' unwillingness to criticize the president. "Newsmax is very supportive of the president, but we also will publish things that are critical of him time to time," Ruddy said. "Fox seems to have decided to become very closely aligned, which seems unnatural and it doesn't seem consistent." He added: "It's just bizarre and I think they lose their credibility as a news organization."

TRUMP FAN'S MEDIA DIET: POLITICO's Michael Kruse visited Trump voters in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, a depressed former steel town, to inquire about their choice a year back. One voter, Joey Del Signore, described Trump as "probably the most diligent, hardest-working president we've ever had in our lifetimes." He continued: "It's not like he sleeps in till noon and goes golfing every weekend, like the last president did."

-- Kruse pointed out to Del Signore that Trump has actually golfed more than former President

Barack Obama (and overall has spent far more time at leisure than his predecessor). So where does Del Signore get his information? "Ninety-nine percent of the time I watch Fox," he said. "Sometimes I'll be sitting there listening to all this Fox stuff, and I'll say, 'Maybe they aren't right, maybe I'll flip to CNN' - but every time I've found that Fox has been correct, and CNN is definitely fake news."

"YOUTUBE'S RAPID RESPONSE PARTISANS": The Times' Kevin Roose tackles a disturbing trend online in the wake of tragedy. "YouTube has long been a haven for slapdash political punditry, but in recent months, a certain type of hyper-prolific conspiracist has emerged as a dominant force," he writes. "By reacting quickly and voluminously to breaking news, these rapid-response pundits - the YouTube equivalent of talk radio shock-jocks - have successfully climbed the site's search results, and exposed legions of viewers to their far-fetched theories."

HILLARY CLINTON GUEST-EDITS TEEN VOGUE: Elaine Welteroth, the magazine's editor-in-chief, writes: "This issue explores what we can all learn from her impact, her style, and her grace under fire. Some will say it's too partisan, too political, too retrospective, too 'echo-chamber-y.' This issue isn't for them. It was designed for the millions who acknowledge that until women, girls, people of color, members of the LGBTQ community, immigrants, and the economically disadvantaged are on an equal playing field, we must hold space for these critical conversations."

WSJ REPORTERS WIN DIRKSEN: James V. Grimaldi and Michelle Hackman have won the prestigious congressional reporting award from the National Press Foundation. Per the judges: "Their investigation revealed that Rep. Tom Price, then the nominee to be HHS secretary, had traded in health stocks while pushing legislation that could affect those stocks. Reverberations from their story dominated Price's confirmation hearings and effectively put him in the crosshairs during his brief tenure at HHS."

WATCH: The first trailer for "The Post," the Pentagon Papers-inspired film directed by Steve Spielberg, is now online. The highly anticipated film, starring Tom Hanks as legendary editor Ben Bradlee and Meryl Streep as Katharine Graham, focuses on the Washington Post's role in publishing the Pentagon Papers and its battle with the Nixon administration prior to Watergate.

-- **Spielberg's framing of events** has rankled some journalists given that the New York Times, and not the Post, actually broke the Pentagon Papers. Max Frankel, the Times Washington bureau chief at the time, told the Columbia Journalism Review in May that it was a "stupid project." The release of the trailer also sparked some Twitter debate, with Gizmodo CEO Raju Narisetti saying the film "overlooks the truth" by taking such a Post-centric view. "It's a movie," responded the Post's Paul Farhi. "So, next time the @nytimes has two characters as compelling as Kay Graham and Ben Bradlee, Spielberg can make THAT movie."

TODAY: AT&T CEO Randall Stephenson, who said Wednesday that he "never offered to sell CNN and have no intention of doing so," will be appearing at the DealBook Conference. Safe to say the Time Warner deal will come up.

REVOLVING DOOR

Seb Gorka, who left the Trump White House in August, has joined Fox News as a national security analyst.

A.J. Chavar, most recently a video journalist at the New York Times, is joining Vox's video team as a senior producer for news.

Rachel Nagler, who has spent six years leading communications for Bloomberg Businessweek, is moving to Bloomberg Philanthropies.

Errin Haines Whack, who has worked in the AP's Philadelphia newsroom since 2015, has been named race and ethnicity writer.

EXTRAS

-- ProPublica received 239 pitches over the past month for local investigative journalism projects.

-- The Freedom of the Press Foundation is helping preserve Gothamist and DNAinfo archives.

-- On Poynter, David Beard addressed how newsrooms can better cover immigration.

-- BuzzFeed's Steven Perlberg reports on James O'Keefe's legal battle with his insurance company.

-- Daily Beast's Kevin Poulsen reports how Kremlin-backed sleeper accounts stormed Twitter on election night 2016 in support of Trump.

-- InfoWars has copied more than 1,000 RT articles to its site without permission, reports BuzzFeed's Jane Lytvynenko.

-- And a nice Karen K. Ho profile of Jay Caspian Kang in the Columbia Journalism Review.

To view online:

<http://www.politico.com/media/tipsheets/morning-media/2017/11/09/doj-urging-cnn-sale-causes-alarm-chuck-todd-takes-long-view-of-press-criticism-breitbart-revisits-2016-clinton-guest-edits-teen-vogue-001376>

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