



Speechwriting Case Study

ETHICS AND LEADERSHIP

The School for Ethics and Global Leadership

n.b. This is a hypothetical exercise. Some facts, events, and characters are real. Others are not.

It is August 2017 and tension between the Trump Administration and the mainstream press is at an all-time high. In the past week, two high-profile incidents have dominated national news and brought this fraught relationship to a head.

On Monday, a man with an AR-15 rifle was arrested trying to gain entrance to a Newseum event titled “Free and Fake: Media Responsibility in the Trump Era.” The man’s Twitter feed showed evidence that he was targeting one of the event’s panelists, an MSNBC reporter recently maligned by conservative media for her “fake news.” Then, on Wednesday, a socialist performance artist smashed a pie in the face of a Fox News host, breaking his nose. The so-called artist made a YouTube video prior to the incident encouraging his followers to target conservative media figures with similar attacks. “They are a joke, so let’s make them a joke,” he said. “Sic Semper Ignoramus!”

In addition to these attacks, confrontations between White House correspondents and White House spokespeople continue to grow. In the eyes of some observers, White House press briefings have become theatre of the absurd, with grandstanding reporters sputtering over repeated White House misstatements of fact and focusing on “gotcha” questioning. In the eyes of press critics, these briefings have become must-see TV for a reality TV-obsessed nation, but they rarely discuss policy that affects everyday Americans. More important, they may be contributing to the escalating violence.

Seeing an opportunity, the White House communications team, with the blessing of the President, decides to stop any audio or visual recording of the daily White House press briefings.

Cable news will no longer cover these briefings live, and only reporter (and White House communications team) notes will document the proceedings.

This presents a quandary for the White House press corps, especially for the many reporters who take their jobs – and the First Amendment – seriously. They believe that transparency is essential to the public’s faith in government and that the Fourth Estate is the link between the two. They believe that live broadcasting of White House briefings is the only way to guarantee unfiltered access to White House officials trying to explain the President’s policies and decisions. At the same time, they feel that they are not only being demonized unfairly by a thin-skinned president, but are being used by the White House as a vehicle to transmit whatever “news” the Administration cares to make – with little accountability.

Speech Assignment

- **Scenario One:** You are Sarah Huckabee Sanders, Principal Deputy White House Press Secretary. In a statement of no more than three minutes, announce to the White House Press corps (and the nation) that all White House press briefings will now be closed to the public. No recording devices of any kind will be allowed. Make a convincing argument that this is in the best interests of the American people.
- **Scenario Two:** You are Jeff Mason, President of the White House Correspondents' Association. In a statement of no more than three minutes, state your strong objection to this new White House policy. Make a convincing argument that live, televised coverage of White House briefings is in the best interests of the American people.

Group A: Zoe, Rory, Hailey, Hunter

Group B: Marshall, Anton, Lauren, Sruti

Group C: Kate, Thor, Miki, Xander

Group D: Charlotte, Emma, Evan, Ryan

Group E: Aya, Ben, Angel, Lily

Group F: Lena, Jackson, Atessa, Mark