

OPINION

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ANOTHER VIEW | BOSTON GLOBE

Hegseth’s war on the press is a losing battle

Defense secretary’s strict limits on free press violate First Amendment and insult war dead

The U.S. Department of Defense — newly re-named the Department of War by the Trump administration — has opted to wage its first war of the new era not on the battlefield but within the bowels of the Pentagon press-room.

The department issued a memo to reporters, saying they would be required to sign a document pledging not to disclose either classified or “controlled unclassified information,” defining that as anything not formally authorized for publication. That’s pretty much the definition of what reporters — good reporters — actually do every day of the week.

They gather news from a variety of sources — including from inside the Pentagon — and bring that reporting through their respective media outlets to the American public.

Secretary Pete Hegseth would apparently prefer to turn a diverse and feisty press corps into a quiescent public relations operation designed to magnify his achievements — whatever they may be.

After several weeks of negotiations failed, more than a dozen of the nation’s major media outlets announced the regulations were contrary to their rights under the First Amendment, and that they had no intention of signing on.

Those outlets included the Associated Press, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and CNN, along with Newsmax and the Washington Times — the latter two among those generally friendly to the Trump administration.

A day later, they were joined by the nation’s major TV outlets, including Hegseth’s former bosses at Fox News. ...

Those not signing on to the untenable waiver of rights proposed by Hegseth had 24 hours to surrender their media credentials and face banishment from the Pentagon itself. They lined up to do so.

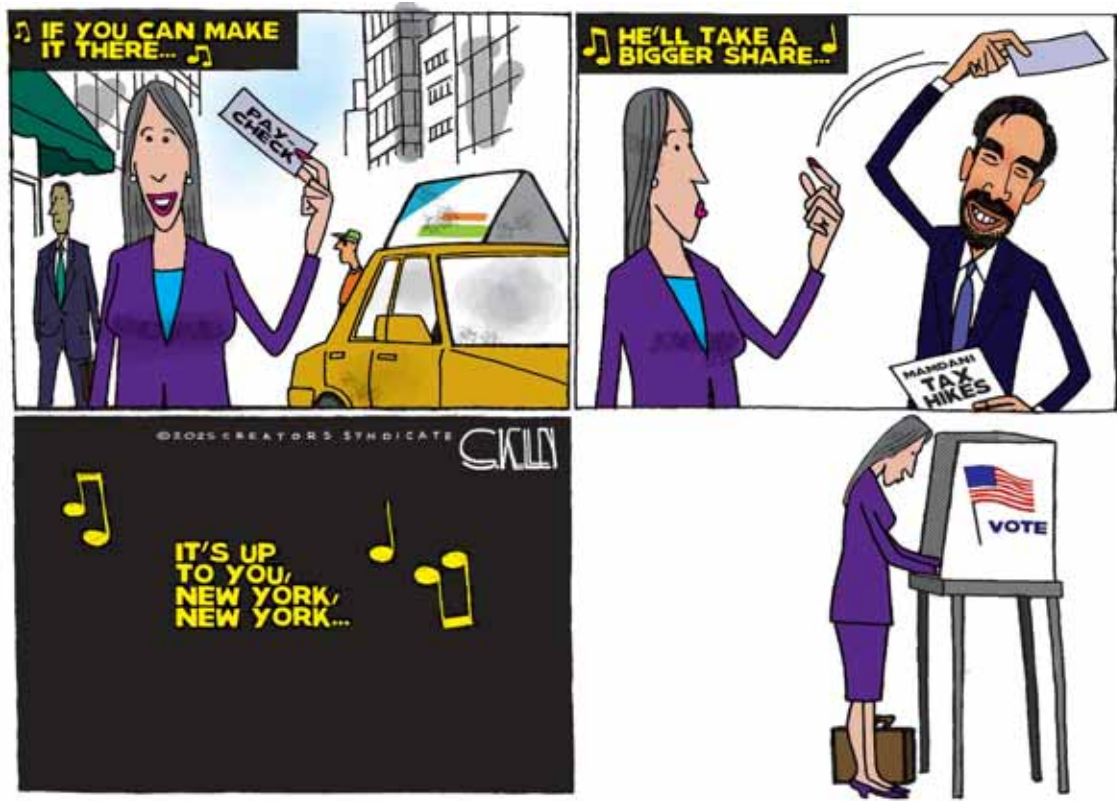
Hegseth responded to the news outlets’ refusal to sign the agreement with a waving hand “bye-bye” emoji on social media.

The real scandal of this administration’s war on the media is the disrespect it shows for those hundreds of reporters who throughout the years — and throughout many wars — have risked and often lost their own lives reporting on this nation’s military from the field. Those embedded with military forces faced the same dangers as U.S. soldiers but came armed with only a notebook or a camera. In the first months of the Iraq War, for example, at least 15 journalists lost their lives, including the Boston Globe’s Elizabeth Neuffer. Before the war was over some 150 journalists and 54 support staffers would be killed covering the conflict, dwarfing the 66 killed during the Vietnam War.

Hegseth is an embarrassment to even an administration that has always seemed beyond embarrassment, a disgrace to the uniform he once wore and to the troops he purports to command.

The press meanwhile will continue to do what it has always done — its job — with or without his help or Pentagon permission.

MY VIEW | STEVE KELLEY



Despite disputes, Democrats can unite around one goal

The only thing the parties can agree on is that President Donald Trump is the central issue of our time.

Let’s start with a recent headline: “It’s 2025, and Democrats are still running against Trump.” “After a year of soul-searching and introspection by Democrats about what they should stand for after losing the White House and Senate in 2024,” Shane Goldmacher of the New York Times writes, “the party is largely coalescing behind the same message that has united it for the past decade: stopping Donald J. Trump.”

Now, I confess to having missed a great deal of soul-searching and introspection among Democrats. But I am reminded of a very different search that happened two decades ago: the search for “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq.

While you might think I am going for some weird metaphor comparing Trump to a WMD, that’s not my point.

For those too young to remember, President George W. Bush’s administration focused on Saddam Hussein’s WMD program as the major justification for toppling the Iraqi dictator.

This became more controversial after U.S. forces failed to find the WMDs the Bush administration, and others, said were there. For opponents of the war, this turned into the refrain that Bush “lied America into war.”

This was always unfair.

Then-Pentagon official Paul Wolfowitz explained why the administration focused on WMDs. “(W)e settled on one issue, weapons of mass destruc-

tion,” Wolfowitz said, “because it was the one reason everyone could agree on.”

It may seem like a stretch, but the parallel came to mind because Trump plays a similar dynamic inside the Democratic Party.

Some segments of the party, personified by Sen. Bernie Sanders and New York City mayoral candidate Zohran Mamdani, are flirting with socialism or social democracy. Others are trying to carve out a more centrist, Bill Clinton-style lane. Some hate Israel. Others defend it. Some want to open the government. Others want to keep the shutdown going. Some support the so-called “abundance agenda,” which seeks to curb government red tape and activist-driven NIMBYism, while others oppose it as a rollback of hard-won environmental and labor protections.

But the one thing they all can agree on: They don’t like Trump.

There are other reasons for focusing on the president. “I worry that Donald Trump is like crack cocaine for our party,” Democratic pollster Celinda Lake told The Times. “Trump is very seductive because when you put up an ad that’s anti-Trump, you get a lot of small-dollar contributions, you get a lot of activists saying, ‘Great job!’”

Lake and other Democrats worry that focusing so much on Trump is distracting the party from fashioning a more positive agenda. They’re right. Democrats are about as unpopular as ever. This is partly because diehards are mad at their own party for not being tougher in its “resistance” to Trump (hence the shutdown). Other Democrats believe the party is too left-wing and are abandoning it.

For instance, in the last five

years, nearly twice as many Pennsylvania Democrats switched their registration to the GOP as the other way around. It should be no surprise that opposition to Trump unifies the Democrats who haven’t left for the Republican Party.

Democrats hope that in the short term, opposition to Trump may be enough to win the upcoming off-year gubernatorial elections in Virginia and New Jersey and, perhaps, in the coming midterms.

After all, Trump is unpopular, too. His overall approval is just 37%, according to the latest AP-NORC poll. The Economist has him at 40% approving of his second term, with 55% disapproving. Americans give him low scores on the economy and, now, immigration as well.

Still, a “blue wave” is unlikely in next year’s midterms. During the same period in his first term, Democrats had a 9-point advantage on the generic congressional ballot. Now, it’s 1.6 percentage points. A lot rides on where the economy will be a year from now.

Trump isn’t just a unifying issue for Democrats. He’s a unifying issue for Republicans as well, which is one reason more people than ever are identifying as independents. Increasingly, calling yourself a Republican means being a Trump supporter for much the same reason that calling yourself a Democrat means being a Trump opponent: It’s the only thing the GOP can agree on.

What this means for the future is unclear, save for one thing: Once Trump is no longer president, both parties are going to have a huge fight trying to figure out what they stand for.

Goldberg is editor-in-chief of The Dispatch: thedispatch.com.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

More people attended rally than reported

I am Mena Sprague. Judy Vohland and I organized our No Kings Rally in Grand Island for Saturday. We scheduled the rally from 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. We arrived at 3:30. The area started to fill up shortly after that.

We had 350 or more in attendance. One gentleman came for 20 minutes of his lunch time. People came and went with their schedule. Sad to say the crew from Channel 4 and The Independent arrived shortly before the end of the rally. We had a count of 350 with more arriving after that. We had Democrats, Republicans, older, younger, LGBTQIA, straight, some in wheelchairs, some ambulatory.

Love and concern for our democracy was the main concerns. There were many honks, thumbs

up and yelling, “Thank you for being here!” Of course there were some birds; there were no confrontations. We left feeling hope and love.

There were attendees from Ord, North Loup, Scotia, Fullerton, Holdrege and one couple from Boise, Idaho. I just want to set the record straight.

Mena Sprague, St. Paul, and Judy Vohland, Grand Island

30% ethanol blend essential

The administration’s tariff-driven trade war has handed the massive \$12 billion U.S. China soybean export market to South America. On Oct. 15, multiple news services reported that Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent plans to bail out Argentina to the tune of \$40 billion. Taken together with their tariffs, the

administration is financing U.S. export competition.

It’s not just a one-year problem for U.S. farmers. China is investing in South American corn and soybean production and marketing export infrastructure for the long term.

U.S. farmers have spent millions of dollars of commodity check-off funds for many years, combined with federal tax dollars, to develop foreign export markets, including China. Negative political U.S. trade policy undermines that investment.

Export intervention always works against the farm economy. One news report also said Iowa U.S. Sen. Charles Grassley told reporters that the U.S. and Trump should have used soybeans as leverage before offering Argentina the bailout.

The Sept. 12 USDA-WASDE

report projects average farm-level 2025-26 soybean prices at only \$10/bushel, \$2.40/bushel below the average 2024 price. The same report projects corn prices at only \$3.90, down from \$4.55 in 2024. And 2026 farm-level wheat prices are projected at only \$5.10, down from nearly \$7/bushel in 2024.

As a result, the farm/rural economy is under severe stress. A government bailout is being discussed. Farmers prefer foreign/domestic markets over bailouts. There is enough history in the books now to confirm that while foreign markets are essential, those important exports are vulnerable to politically driven U.S. trade intervention.

This reality requires immediate, aggressive, updated ethanol and biodiesel federal policy to quickly utilize much larger quantities of corn and soybeans

right here in the domestic U.S. market. It’s essential!

Members of Congress have introduced legislation authorizing 15% ethanol blends nationwide and year-round. That’s a good first step, but it comes late in the game.

Congress should amend the 15% ethanol blend bill, authorizing a 30% nationwide ethanol blend immediately. The Oct. 16 edition of The Independent ran a spot-on column, “Fueling our way out of a surplus of corn a here-and-now solution” by the executive director of the Nebraska Ethanol Board. That column and its information make an ironclad case for E-30 ethanol blends. Congress needs to act on it.

Dan McGuire, policy director, American Corn Growers Foundation Lincoln

THE FIRST AMENDMENT
Freedom of Religion, Press, Expression

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.