

The wrecking ball of Trump's unchecked power destroys both the law and the East Wing | Column

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Former Pa. Lt. Gov. Mark Singel in Sarasota, FL, Jan. 13, 2022. Daniel Wagner | Special to PennLivePhoto by Daniel Wagner

By Mark S. Singel

Am I the only one who thinks that it is tone deaf and inexcusable that the president is building his own personal Versailles when 20 million Americans are in danger of losing their health care benefits?

Does anyone object to spending \$300 million on this billionaire's ballroom when over a trillion dollars has been taken away from human service programs for the poor and working families of this country?

Note that the president's justification for taking a bulldozer to the White House is that someone else is paying for it. In an extraordinary shake down of friendly billionaires recently, contributors

were promised that they would receive “recognition associated with the Donald J. Trump Ballroom at the White House.”

According to Time magazine, the donors included executives from Google, Amazon, Lockheed Martin, Microsoft, Open AI and Coinbase, just to name a few.

Others at the event included oil and gas moguls, bitcoin billionaires and some investment bankers with very deep pockets. But let’s all remember that they have had a lucrative return already. These are the very people that will benefit most from the \$7 trillion tax cut that Trump forced through Congress.

And what about the assurances that we had from the president just weeks ago? The New York Times reported that the president would leave the East Wing alone. “It won’t interfere with the current building. It’ll be near it but not touching it,” Trump said. Now that the East Wing has been demolished, we are left with another broken promise and another desecration of the people’s house.

This is not a Jackie Kennedy redecoration of the White House. It is not an Eisenhower balcony project. It is not Nixon’s bowling alley. It is the replacement of the entire East Wing with a 90,000 square foot monstrosity that is designed specifically to splatter the name of Donald J. Trump all over its garish entrance for all time.

The wrecking ball that reduced the East Wing to rubble is an apt metaphor for what Donald J. Trump is doing to the rule of law.

Just like there was no review or permitting for the demolition, there is no due process before deadly force is brought to bear on boats in international waters.

There is no approval sought to invade his own cities – even over the objections of state and local authorities.

There seems to be no stopping Trump from using the Justice Department as his own personal inquisitor as he takes vengeance on anybody he perceives as an adversary. A question that we should all be asking is: Where is the oversight? Who are the adults in the room?

The National Trust for Historic Preservation made an attempt at monitoring the East Wing project. They politely asked the administration “to pause demolition until plans for the proposed ballroom go through the legally required public review processes.” The Trust, of course, was ignored.

The National Capital Planning Commission is another entity charged with reviewing any and every external construction project at the White House. In a remarkable display of hubris, the president brushed them aside and said simply that he would send something to the commission when the plans were ready.

Two problems with that approach: First, the demolition has already been done. Imagine the fines any of us would face if we tore down an old porch without a plan or approval from local zoning officials.

Secondly, Trump has stacked the deck of the commission itself. The twelve-member board is made up of mostly Trump allies and its chairman, Will Scharf, actually works in the White House.

“It’s not his house. It’s your house. And he’s destroying it,” Hillary Clinton texted.

More importantly, it’s not his government, either, but he is systematically undoing 250 years of constitutional guardrails with nothing more than a whimper coming from Republican leaders in Congress. Even the courts have capitulated and allowed immunity from actions that would have been illegal in any other era.

The difference today is that there is no one in power challenging the whims of one man. Even though seven million citizens march in the streets to demand “No Kings,” the message doesn’t get through to people who should be listening. Surely, some staff members in the White House have the character to speak out. Could we at least get Congressional leaders to protect the powers of the legislative branch?

If there are no constraints on a reckless leader, the destruction to the country will be much more than an East Wing in ruins.

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