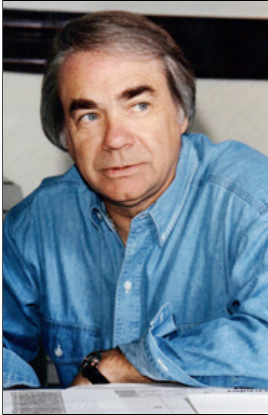




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You're Allowed to Feel Bad for Sean Spicer



You're Allowed to Feel Bad for Sean Spicer
By Carl Golden

It's difficult to not sympathize with presidential press secretary Sean Spicer.

For an hour or so each afternoon, the White House press corps turns Spicer into their personal dart board, flinging barbed and frequently disrespectful questions at him and often arguing with him if they're dissatisfied with his response.

The uproar over President Trump's unsupported allegations that former President Obama had tapped telephones in the Trump Tower campaign offices sent media everywhere into indignation overdrive, but reporters assigned to the White House all but scaled the podium in the briefing room to get at Spicer.

After more than a week of explaining, clarifying, and defending, Spicer finally conceded that the president's use of the word "wiretapping" shouldn't be taken literally and he didn't mean to suggest that the former president had personally ordered the eavesdropping.

He re-defined "wiretapping" to mean electronic surveillance generally - not simply telephones - and it was "the Obama administration" that Trump had in mind as the culprit, rather than Obama himself.

It was a hard sell and didn't accomplish much in the way of deflecting the media's torrent of darts.

Demands for proof of the wiretapping rained down on Spicer's head while his explanation that the issue was a matter for the appropriate committees of Congress to investigate did little to quell the storm.

Even in the face of Congressional testimony from FBI Director James Comey that the agency found no evidence of wiretapping, Spicer reiterated the President's claim and said there would be no apology.

He earlier caused an international furor when he referenced a news account that claimed the Obama Administration had enlisted British intelligence to spy on the campaign. The Brits, not surprisingly, hit the roof of Parliament and a White House apology followed.

He hasn't been helped by presidential counselor Kellyanne Conway who hit the talk show circuit again, including an interview in which she asserted that everyone knows surreptitious surveillance can be conducted through television sets in America's living rooms and by cameras in microwave ovens in America's kitchens.

Left unsaid was how many photos of Hungry Man meatloaf dinner cartons were amassed by spy agencies.

When asked for proof of the snooping allegations, Conway airily dismissed it, saying "I'm not in the evidence business."

Conway, who laid low for a week or so after a string of public blunders drew ridicule and disbelief, resumed her media tour in an attempt to reclaim her reputation as a White House insider.

Her vigorous defense of the president, despite her occasional cockeyed logic and declarations, has either restored her favor with the president or she's chosen to disregard the fallout in the larger interest of advancing her own status.

Like press secretaries before him, Spicer has become the face of the Trump Administration, and his televised press briefings audience exceeds that of afternoon soap operas.

Numerous reports suggest that Trump tunes in to Spicer's briefings, critiquing them in real time and even dispatching a staffer to the briefing room to deliver notes to the podium.

Because Spicer is the president's front man with reporters, he bears the brunt of whatever criticism and anger spills from the Oval Office.

Presidential press secretary is an extraordinarily difficult position under any circumstances. It demands serving two masters - the president and the news media - while maintaining an even disposition and a calm demeanor in the face of an often hostile, skeptical band of reporters.

Spicer has displayed a combative side when peppered repeatedly by the same question posed in slightly different form or when interrupted in mid-answer by a reporter who feels a challenge is in order.

By all accounts, his first briefing following the president's inaugural was an unmitigated disaster. He berated the media for deliberately misrepresenting the size of the crowd at the swearing-in ceremony, before turning his back and stalking off the stage without taking questions.

Subsequent briefings have been noticeably more mellow, but the tension is never far below the surface.

As long as his boss continues to tee up debates and controversy with 140 characters blasted out at 6 a.m., Spicer will remain in the eye of the storm, explaining and establishing context favorable to the Administration.

For her part, Conway should realize and accept the reality that she shouldn't add to Spicer's burdens or heighten his angst with tales similar to the microwave oven spying.

He'll still face the media darts on a daily basis, but at the very least he deserves a chance to become more adept at dodging them.

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