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Effective
April 1, 2017**

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Residential &
Commercial Services**
Minimum Service CHG.
\$50.00
A small distance/travel
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Pre-Spray Traffic Areas
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Includes Pre-Spray Traffic Area
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Area/Oriental Rugs (Wool):
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(Requiring Extensive Pre-Spraying)

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OPINION



A Sustained Attack against the Free Press

Journalists in Trump's crosshairs

BY PETER CERTO

How can you tell an authoritarian when you see one? We know the 20th century hallmarks — brown shirts, street rallies, and the like.

But there's an autocratic attitude, some historians suggest, that can easily be traced across the centuries.

To put it simply, New York University professor Ruth Ben-Ghiat told Democracy Now recently, "authoritarians believe that institutions should serve them, and not the other way around."

Just ask Jim Comey — who, as recently as October, might've been Donald Trump's favorite person.

Less than two weeks before the November vote, the now-former FBI director announced that he was reopening an investigation into one of Trump's favorite subjects: Hillary Clinton's emails. For that, Trump praised

Comey's "guts," while Clinton now blames Comey's announcement for costing her the election.

Trump seemed happy to accept that help. But in a twist, Comey also found the guts to investigate whether Trump accepted help from the Russians, too. For that, he was fired this month. "This Russia thing" was "a made-up story," Trump complained by way of explanation.

All that's explosive enough. Even more so was a subsequent revelation: That Trump had called on Comey to "let go" of an investigation into Michael Flynn, Trump's national security adviser who'd been ousted for lying about his own contacts with the Russians.

That little bombshell is now headline news all over. But buried in the New York Times story about that memo was another, less noticed bomblet: "Alone in the Oval Office," the paper reported, Trump said "Comey should consider putting reporters in prison for publishing classified information."

That's right: In addition to asking Comey to stop investigating his friend Flynn, the president called on the FBI director to ar-

rest journalists who published things Trump found unflattering. Perhaps including stories like this one.

Was this an impulsive request? Not likely. In fact, the administration appears to have been laying the groundwork for this for some time.

Take WikiLeaks. Trump once said he "loved" the group for publishing leaked Clinton campaign emails. But then it earned the White House's enmity by also publishing details about CIA hacking.

Trump's CIA director has since described WikiLeaks as "a hostile foreign intelligence service" and warned that "America's First Amendment freedoms" will not "shield them from justice." Attorney General Jeff Sessions is now trying to bring a case against the group's founder, Julian Assange.

While leaking classified information may be a crime, publishing it most certainly isn't — that's been protected by the Supreme Court since the early 1970s. In this respect, any charges brought against WikiLeaks could equally be brought against virtually every newspaper and TV station in the country.

Which, by all appearances,

is the idea. When CNN asked if the WikiLeaks case could lead to charges against other outlets, Sessions didn't bother to deny it.

Of course, this is all under the auspices of a candidate who called journalists "lying, disgusting people" and even wondered aloud about whether he'd kill them as president. (He ultimately said no, but seemed reluctant.) And it's the same White House that wants to sue journalists whose reporting it disputes.

But consider that Michael S. Schmidt, the Times reporter who broke the Comey memo story, happens to be the very same person who reported on Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server. Has anyone benefited more from that reporting than Trump?

It all depends on the headlines that come next, apparently.

They've surely been spotty about it, but in a democracy public institutions — from law enforcement to the free press — are supposed to serve the public, not the president. If Trump can't accept that, maybe he's the one who should be fired.

Peter Certo is the editorial manager of the Institute for Policy Studies and the editor of OtherWords.org.