



The debate over what's fair and what falls under the freedom of the press

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WASHINGTON (SBG) — The press has long challenged politicians and the same is true of politicians going after the media, especially if they don't like the reporting.

From President Richard Nixon's epic clashes with the media, threatening The New York Times and Washington Post to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt disparaging of the press at large, convinced the media was out to get him, to the Justice Department under President Barack Obama seizing phone records of reporters in effort to track down leaks, the government and the media have long found themselves at odds.

"We have the First Amendment, but of course, that doesn't mean we haven't had problems," said Walter Olson, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. "Politicians have been feuding with the press for as long as there have been politicians and the press."

Now, Marilyn Mosby, the State's Attorney for Baltimore City, has filed a complaint with the FCC asking it investigate Baltimore TV station WBFF for its relentless coverage of her office, saying it "could reasonably be categorized as blatantly slanted, dishonest, misleading, racist and extremely dangerous".

Mosby's representative called it an "intentional crusade" against her.

WBFF, an affiliate of Sinclair, says the station is simply 'shining a light' on government actions, including an ongoing FBI investigation into the finances of Mosby and her husband, the City Council President Nick Mosby, and on her recent push to not prosecute some low-level crimes.

"It's scary and chilling to think that local politicians being covered by local broadcasters, which is the way it should work, can shut them up by going to their regulators," Olson said.

Politicians and the press seem increasingly at odds, most blatantly perhaps when President Donald Trump revoked White House access to reporters with whom he constantly butted heads, only to have the courts tell the White House it couldn't.

Whether it's picking and choosing, as Florida's Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis did just this week, only allowing Fox News into his controversial voting rights bill signing, or the debate over who or what is allowed on big tech's social media platforms these days, prompting numerous Congressional hearings, it's a new chapter in the fight over journalistic accountability versus freedom of speech.

"You have to let journalists do their job," Olson said. "It's fair game to criticize them when they do it badly, but there's that sharp line between criticizing them and sicking the law on them."