

Steve Bannon on '60 Minutes': Mainstream Media Trying to 'Destroy' Donald Trump



Courtesy CBS

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Steve Bannon, in his first major interview since stepping down as Donald Trump's chief strategist, lashed out at the mainstream media, saying it's trying to destroy Trump, and defended the president's use of Twitter as a necessary way of going over their heads.

Bannon, in an interview with Charlie Rose for "60 Minutes," also railed against entrenched interests in Washington, and said the "original sin" of the Trump administration was embracing the establishment. Republican congressional leadership put their plan to repeal and replace Obamacare atop their agenda, but found that their own caucus was bitterly divided on how to do so.

His criticisms of the media — which he labeled the "pearl clutching mainstream media" — are hardly surprising, given that he referred to the D.C. press corps as the "opposition party" shortly after Trump took office.

"I don't think [Trump] needs the Washington Post, and the New York Times, and CBS News," Bannon told Rose on Sunday night. "And I don't believe that he thinks they're looking out [for] what's in his best interest, okay? He's not going to believe that. I don't believe that. And you don't believe that, okay? This is just another standard in judgment that you rain upon him in the effort to destroy Donald Trump."

Rose had questioned Trump's use of Twitter.

But Bannon said Trump "knows he's speaking directly to the people who put him in office when he uses Twitter. And it is sometimes not in the custom and tradition of what the opposition party deems is appropriate. You're absolutely correct, it's not. And he's not going to stop."

He also said Trump's chief of staff, John Kelly, also is "not going to be able to

control it, either, because it's Donald Trump. It's Donald Trump talking directly to the American people. And to say something else, you're going to get some good there. And every now and again you're going to get some less good, okay? But you're just going to have to live with it."

Bannon was steadfastly loyal to Trump, and said that he would continue to defend the president from the outside. After his resignation from the White House, Bannon returned to Breitbart News, the media company he led before Trump tapped him as campaign CEO in August, 2016.

Bannon noted that during his tenure with Trump, he was referred to as the "grim reaper" on "Saturday Night Live." He said that the characterizations don't bother him.

"I don't need the affirmation of the mainstream media. I don't care what they say," he said. "They can call me an anti-Semite. They can call me racist. They call me nativist. You can call me anything you want. Okay? As long as we're driving this agenda for the working men and women of this country, I'm happy."

Bannon said in the 48 hours after Trump won, a "fundamental decision" was made that "you might call it the original sin of the administration" — to embrace the establishment GOP as a way to staff up the government.

"Our whole campaign was a little bit the island of misfit toys," Bannon said. "So [Trump] looks around and I'm wearin' my combat jacket, I haven't shaved, I got — you know, my hair's down to here, and he says — he's — he's thinkin'. 'Hey, I've gotta put together a government. I've gotta really staff up somethin'. I need to embrace the establishment.'"

In excerpts of the interview released last week, Bannon said the GOP establishment was trying to "nullify" the 2016 election, and named Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Paul Ryan as figures who "do not want Donald Trump's populist, economic nationalist agenda to be implemented. It's very obvious."

Bannon suggested that the inability to repeal and replace Obamacare was due in part to GOP leaders who didn't realize the "wide discrepancy" in the Republican party. Instead, he expressed doubts that Congress would be able to totally repeal it.

In the interview, Bannon was every bit the defiant persona he was in the few times he gave a brief interview or appeared at the CPAC conference. He sparred at points with Rose. In one instance, when they were talking about immigration, and as Bannon tried to say that America “was built on her citizens,” Rose interjected, “Except the native Americans.”

“This is the thing of the leftists,” Bannon said. “Charlie, that’s beneath you.”

Still, Bannon warned that there could be further disunity over the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, in which young undocumented immigrants who came to the United States before they were 16 can be eligible for work permits to avoid deportation.

Trump last week announced that he planned to end the program, but that it would be wound down over a period of six months so Congress could come up with a legislative fix.

Bannon supports ending the program, but warns that the delay could prove to further divide Republicans. He said his fear “is that with this six months down range, if we have another huge — if this goes all the way down to its logical conclusion, in February and March it will be a civil war inside the Republican party that will be every bit as vitriolic as 2013. And to me, doing that in the springboard of primary season for 2018 is extremely unwise.”

He said he thinks the program should be ended, and that “as the work permits run out they self deport” and that “there’s no path to citizenship, no path to a green card and — no amnesty. Amnesty is non-negotiable.”

“America is built on our citizens,” Bannon said. “Look at the 19th century. What built America’s called the American system, from Hamilton to Polk to Henry Clay to Lincoln to the Roosevelts. A system of protection of our manufacturing, financial system that lends to manufacturers, okay, and the control of our borders.”

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