

I've been a reporter for 30 years at CBS News, PBS, CNN and in local news. My producers and I have probed countless political, corporate, charitable and financial stories ranging from Iraq contract waste and fraud under Bush to green energy waste under Obama to consumer stories relating to the drug industry.

Some of these reports have been recognized for excellence in journalism—most recently, investigative Emmy nominations and awards for reporting on TARP, Benghazi, green energy spending, Fast and Furious and a group of stories including an undercover investigation into Republican fundraising.

But the job of getting at the truth has never been more difficult.

Facets of federal government have isolated themselves from the public they serve. They covet and withhold public information that we, as citizens, own. They bully and threaten access of journalists who do their jobs, news organizations that publish stories they don't like and whistleblowers who dare to tell the truth.

When I reported on factual contradictions in the administration's accounts regarding Fast and Furious, pushback included a frenzied campaign with White House officials trying to chill the reporting by calling and emailing my superiors and colleagues, and using surrogate bloggers to advance false claims. One White House official got so mad, he angrily cussed me out.

The Justice Department used its authority over building security to handpick reporters allowed to attend a Fast and Furious briefing, refusing to clear me into the public Justice Department building.

Advocates had to file a lawsuit to obtain public information about Fast and Furious improperly withheld under executive privilege. Documents recently released show emails in which taxpayer paid White House and Justice Department press officials complained that I was "out of control," and vowed to call my bosses to try to stop my reporting.

Let me emphasize that my reporting was factually indisputable. Government officials weren't angry because I was doing my job poorly. They were panicked because I was doing my job well.

*Many* journalists have provided their own accounts.

The White House made good on its threat to punish C-SPAN after C-SPAN dared to defy a White House demand to delay airing a potentially embarrassing interview with the President.

Fifty news organizations, including *CBS* and the *Washington Post* wrote the White House objecting to unprecedented restrictions on the press that raise constitutional concerns.

A New York Times photographer likened White House practices to the Soviet news agency Tass.

Former *Washington Post* executive editor Len Downie called the Obama War on Leaks “by far the most aggressive” he’s seen since Nixon.

David Sanger of the *New York Times* called this “the most closed, control freak administration” he’s ever covered.

*New York Times* public editor Margaret Sullivan said it’s “the administration of unprecedented secrecy and unprecedented attacks on a free press.”

ABC News correspondent Ann Compton called Obama “the least transparent of the seven presidents” she’s covered.

Months before we knew the Justice Department had secretly seized AP phone records and surveilled FOX News’ James Rosen, before Director of National Intelligence James Clapper incorrectly testified under oath that Americans weren’t subject to mass data collection... I was tipped off that the government was likely secretly monitoring me due to my reporting.

Three forensics exams confirmed intrusive, long-term remote surveillance. That included keystroke monitoring, password capture, use of Skype to listen into audio and exfiltrate files, and more.

Getting to the bottom of it hasn’t been easy. It’s unclear what, if anything, the FBI has done to investigate.

The Justice Department has refused to answer simple, direct, written Congressional questions about its knowledge of the case. It has stonewalled my Freedom of Information requests... first claiming it had no documents, then eventually identifying 2,500 but never providing them.

In 2013, Reporters Without Borders downgraded America’s standing in the global free press rankings, rating the Obama administration as worse than Bush’s.

It matters not, that when caught, the government promises to dial back or that James Rosen gets an apology.

The message has already been received: if you cross the administration with perfectly accurate reporting that they don’t like: you will be attacked and punished. You and your sources may be subjected to the kind of surveillance devised for enemies of the state.

For much of history, the United States has held itself out as a model of freedom, democracy, and open, accountable government. Freedoms of expression and association are protected by the Constitution.

Today, those freedoms are under assault due to government policies of secrecy, leak prevention, and officials' contact with the media, combined with large-scale surveillance programs.

The nominee, if confirmed, should chart a new path and reject the damaging policies and practices that have been used by others in the past.

If we aren't brave enough to confront these concerns, it could do serious, long-term damage to a supposedly free press.