

OP-ED | POLITICS & ELECTIONS

The Men Disputing Hutchinson's Testimony Are Two of Trump's Biggest Acolytes

Tony Ornato was once Trump's senior Secret Service agent. Bobby Engel is Trump's current senior Secret Service agent.

By William Rivers Pitt, Truthout

July 1, 2022



Cassidy Hutchinson, former aide to Trump White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, is sworn in on Capitol Hill on June 28, 2022, in Washington, D.C., to testify during a hearing as the House select committee investigating the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol continues to share findings of its investigation.

JABIN BOTSIFORD / THE WASHINGTON POST VIA GETTY IMAGES

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It was testimony that, for a moment, stopped the world in its tracks.

So, once the president had gotten into the vehicle with [Secret Service agent] Bobby [Engel], he thought that they were going up to the Capitol. And when Bobby had relayed to him we're not, we don't have the assets to do it, it's not secure, we're going back to the West Wing, the president had a very strong, a very angry response to that.

[White House chief of operations] Tony [Ornato] described him as being irate. The president said something to the effect of I'm the f'ing president, take me up to the Capitol now, to which Bobby responded, sir, we have to go back to the West Wing. The president reached up towards the front of the vehicle to grab at the steering wheel. Mr. Engel grabbed his arm, said, sir, you need to take your hand off the steering wheel.

We're going back to the West Wing. We're not going to the Capitol. Mr. Trump then used his free hand to lunge towards Bobby Engel. And Mr. — when Mr. Ornato had recounted this story to me, he had motioned towards his clavicles.

With this, former White House aide Cassidy Hutchinson did something few had managed in the six years since Donald Trump rode a golden escalator, and the presidency, down to the depths: She made a great many jaded people actually stop and recoil in horror.

For a while now, that hadn't seemed possible; "this is not normal" had become all too normal, and a callus had formed over the sensibilities of most. There's only so much folks can take before the circuits start to melt, and that was certainly the plan with the Trump administration, as was made plain by former White House adviser Steve Bannon's operating dictum: "Flood the zone with shit."

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Hutchinson cut through that like a hot knife through, well, shit. She asserted that Trump tried to commandeer the limo and then choke a Secret Service agent because he wanted to physically join the armed insurrectionists sacking the Capitol — and just like that, at long last, a line was finally crossed. While other aspects of her testimony were

more legally damaging — Trump tried to wave armed protesters through security when he knew they were armed and Capitol-bound stands out above all — this vignette was the unavoidable boulder in the road.

Of course, it could not be allowed to stand. Trump immediately blazed forth with a frightened-sounding aria of his greatest hits: *This woman who is a woman knows nothing and did nothing and was never anywhere and I never met her witch hunt Democrats MAGA give me money!* The heavy lifting to debunk the humongous problem presented by Hutchinson's testimony has fallen to the two men who were in the car with Trump when he allegedly flipped out: Tony Ornato and Bobby Engel.

Within hours of Hutchinson's testimony, it was announced that Ornato and Engel disputed her version of events and were willing to testify on this point. This was the equivalent of stopping the hole in the Titanic's hull with a roll of paper towels, but the flooding belowdecks did briefly subside. If her testimony proved questionable on this matter, it casts a bleak light on her entire appearance at the hearing.

Ornato, and by connection Engel appear to be so deep in the bag for Trump, they may as well be golf balls.

Here's where it gets interesting. Tony Ornato was once Trump's senior Secret Service agent, and has been a huge Trump fan from the beginning. Trump likes Ornato so much that he elevated Ornato to an official administration position: White House chief of operations. Ornato's main portfolio included stage-managing all of Trump's rallies, campaign events, photo-ops and so forth.

Engel is Trump's current senior Secret Service agent, and works hand in glove with Ornato to arrange and manage Trump's public appearances. Given the enormous attention Trump pays to how much attention he's getting paid, it is not too far a cry to say Ornato and Engel held two of the most important gigs in the White House, with Ornato enjoying the superior spot between the two... and according to [multiple reports](https://www.mediaite.com/tv/washington-posts-carol-leonnig-outlines-trump-deputy-tony-ornatos-troubling-history-with-the-truth-not-so-great/) (<https://www.mediaite.com/tv/washington-posts-carol-leonnig-outlines-trump-deputy-tony-ornatos-troubling-history-with-the-truth-not-so-great/>), both men have become practiced at altering reality to serve Trump's needs and desires.

“Tony Ornato has said a lot of things didn't happen,” *Washington Post* reporter Carol Leonnig [told](https://www.mediaite.com/tv/washington-posts-carol-leonnig-outlines-trump-deputy-tony-ornatos-troubling-history-with-the-truth-not-so-great/) (<https://www.mediaite.com/tv/washington-posts-carol-leonnig-outlines-trump-deputy-tony-ornatos-troubling-history-with-the-truth-not-so-great/>) *MSNBC*. “He has tried to say to the press and to me indirectly that the clearing of Lafayette Square was not done for President Trump's photo op. Well, that's not true. He was at the center of that.... The Secret Service often tries to deny things that are unflattering and then when the rubber hits the road, we learn there is a little bit more to it.”

Indeed. It is also worth noting that neither Ornato nor Engel were under oath when they denied the incident, while Hutchinson was sworn before a committee on Capitol Hill when she related her version of events.

Until those men offer sworn testimony refuting hers, Hutchinson's words will likely carry the day. Ornato, and by connection, Engel, appear to be so deep in the bag for Trump, they may as well be golf balls. Hutchinson, by comparison, has everything to lose by getting crosswise with Trump *and* labeled a liar.

My money is on Cassidy Hutchinson, until somebody damned reliable tells me otherwise.

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WILLIAM RIVERS PITT ([HTTPS://TRUTHOUT.ORG/AUTHORS/WILLIAM-RIVERS-PITT/](https://truthout.org/authors/william-rivers-pitt/))

William Rivers Pitt was Truthout's lead columnist and senior editor. He died on September 29, 2022, at the age of 59. If you're giving for Will, as so many of us are, you can support a fund for his 9-year-old daughter Lola [here](https://www.gofundme.com/f/william-rivers-pitt-memorial-fundraiser-for-lola) (<https://www.gofundme.com/f/william-rivers-pitt-memorial-fundraiser-for-lola>).

William was a New York Times and internationally bestselling author of three books: *War on Iraq: What Team Bush Doesn't Want You to Know* (https://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/1893956385/qid=1055796595/sr=1-2/ref=sr_1_2/002-8359763-1225605?v=glance&s=books), *The Greatest Seditious Is Silence* (https://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0745320104/qid=1055796595/sr=1-1/ref=sr_1_1/002-8359763-1225605?v=glance&s=books) and *House of Ill Repute: Reflections on War, Lies, and America's Ravaged Reputation* (https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0977825329/sr=1-2/qid=1155755822/ref=pd_bbs_2/102-5663939-2555327?pf_rd_p=102-5663939-2555327&pf_rd_r=102-5663939-2555327). His fourth book, *The Mass Destruction of Iraq: Why It Is Happening, and Who Is Responsible* (<https://www.amazon.com/Mass-Destruction-Iraq-Disintegration-Responsible-ebook/dp/B00ML3KAN6>), co-written with Dahr Jamail (<https://truthout.org/author/itemlist/user/44706>), is available now on Amazon.

