

Trump's Faulty 'Double Standard' Document Claim

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Former President Donald Trump made a series of faulty comparisons to other past presidents to argue that he was being held to a double standard regarding the FBI's pursuit of his presidential documents.

Trump accused several of his presidential predecessors of storing White House documents, including ones that were classified, in unsecured warehouse spaces. But all of the examples Trump mentioned were cases of the National Archives and Records Administration — not the former presidents themselves — storing documents in secure facilities, while permanent presidential libraries were being built.

For example, Trump said, “George H.W. Bush took millions and millions of documents to a former bowling alley pieced together with what was then an old and broken Chinese restaurant, they put them together. And it had a broken front door and broken windows. Other than that it was quite secure. And there was no security.”

That drew a bewildered response from the late George H.W. Bush's son and Trump nemesis, Jeb Bush, who tweeted a link to a clip of Trump's rally in Arizona on Oct. 9 and commented, “I am so confused. My dad enjoyed a good Chinese meal and enjoyed the challenge of 7 10 split. What the heck is up with you?”

Documents and artifacts from the elder Bush's time in the presidency were kept for several years in a former bowling alley in the mid-1990s, while the permanent George H.W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum was under construction on the campus of Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas. The delay gave archivists time to curate some 40,000

objects, such as gifts from foreign dignitaries, and 36 million pages of official records and personal papers. It was so much stuff that some of it had to be stored next door “in what used to be the kitchen of a Chinese restaurant,” according to an [Associated Press story](#) in 1994.

“Some printed material is classified and will remain so for years; it is open only to those with top-secret clearances,” the AP said.

But contrary to Trump’s claim that there was “no security” at the building, AP wrote: “Uniformed guards patrol the premises. There are closed-circuit television monitors and sophisticated electronic detectors along walls and doors.”

[Dr. Robert Holzweiss](#), deputy director of the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, told [People magazine](#) in February, “When I got involved the temporary facility for the Bush museum was in College Station, Texas, in an old bowling alley. Without the alleys it was perfect, it was like a warehouse. They just built a secure space within to house the classified material.”

Note that he says the classified materials were held in a “secure space” built by NARA.

And in any case, none of the presidential records, including classified documents, were in Bush’s possession or in his personal residence, as was the case with documents seized from Trump’s Mar-a-Lago in Florida. In [a timeline](#) of the FBI’s investigation of Trump’s handling of highly classified documents, we detailed the numerous steps NARA and the Department of Justice took in an effort to retrieve government records from Trump after he left office — including numerous formal requests, a grand jury subpoena and a court-approved search warrant. On Aug. 8, the Justice Department seized 13 boxes that contained numerous documents, many highly classified or top secret.

But at the rally on Oct. 9, Trump [brought up](#) several former presidents in an attempt to make the case that he was unfairly being singled out by federal authorities over presidential records.

“We have a weaponized Department of Justice and FBI and everything including, of course, the break-in of my home,” Trump said. “[W]e could call it the warehouse case because many other presidents stored their millions of pages of stuff in unsecured warehouses, some of them without front doors that worked properly. Just look at how every other president has been treated when they left office. They’ve been treated beautifully. ... They’ve been given the time needed and complete deference when it came to their documents and to their papers. There was no criminality.”

Trump then talked about the handling of presidential documents by some of his predecessors to claim that he is being held to a “double standard.”

Obama's Records

Trump falsely said that Barack Obama “moved more than 20 truckloads, over 33 million pages of documents, both classified and unclassified, to a poorly built and totally unsafe former furniture store located in a rather bad neighborhood in Chicago,” claiming, “They just found that out.”

No one “just found that out.” NARA moved and controlled records from the Obama administration after he left office.

In the days after the FBI executed a search warrant at Trump's Mar-a-Lago property on Aug. 8, Trump repeatedly raised questions about Obama's handling of presidential records. On Sept. 23, NARA released a statement contradicting Trump's account.

NARA statement, Sept. 23: The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) administers the Barack Obama Presidential Library, located in Hoffman Estates, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. The library holds records from the Obama presidential administration and is leased, controlled, managed, and used exclusively by NARA. The Obama Foundation, an independent entity, has never had control over the records in Hoffman Estates. All records in that facility are stored and managed by NARA in accordance with archival storage standards, and all classified records were stored in an appropriately secured compartment within the facility. NARA moved these records at the end of the Obama administration to the Hoffman Estates facility under the assumption that former President Obama and his Foundation would be building and transferring to NARA a traditional, physical Presidential Library in the Chicago area. When former President Obama decided that he would not build a physical, NARA-operated Presidential Library, NARA transported the classified records back to secure locations in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. The Obama Foundation provided NARA with funds to help convert the Hoffman Estates facility and to cover some of the expenses of moving the classified records, but the foundation has never had possession or control over the records.

Presidents George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter

Trump also misleadingly claimed that President George W. Bush “stored 68 million pages in a warehouse in Texas,” and that Bill Clinton “took millions of documents from the White House to a former car dealership in Arkansas.” In both cases, NARA controlled the documents at temporary facilities (a warehouse in Bush's case and a former car dealership in Clinton's case) before the presidential libraries were constructed.

A Jan. 15, 2009, NARA media alert said that once Bush left office a few days later on Jan. 20, “his official records and gifts received on behalf of the U.S. Government become the property of the National Archives and Records Administration,” which was transferring the

material to “a temporary Library facility in Lewisville Texas approximately 20 miles from the permanent Library site on the campus of Southern Methodist University in Dallas.”

At the end of that year, a Washington Post article described the facility as a “warehouse,” reporting that “68 million pages of documents,” along with 175 million emails and many other objects and artifacts from Bush’s years in the White House had been “meticulously catalogued, wrapped, stored and guarded in the climate-controlled warehouse” managed by NARA in Lewisville. “It will all eventually move to the \$300 million George W. Bush Presidential Library opening at Southern Methodist University in 2013.”

Similarly, in 2000, NARA leased a 42,000-square-foot facility, “formerly the Balch Motor Company,” a NARA press release said, in Little Rock, Arkansas, until the Clinton Presidential Library could be built.

There’s nothing unusual about NARA using converted facilities to temporarily store presidential records and artifacts while until a permanent presidential library is built.

According to NARA, “Repurposed storage facilities are a trademark of temporary library locations. The records from the Reagan administration were housed in a converted pasta factory. For the records of the George H. W. Bush administration, a bowling alley and an adjacent Chinese restaurant were combined to provide space for the records. A former car dealership housed the Clinton records in Little Rock.”

Tapes, Emails and Nuclear Codes

Trump made a few other false and misleading claims about George W. Bush, Clinton and Carter.

He said that Clinton “kept classified recordings in his sock. ... They say he left the White House with recordings in his sock, and they found them in his sock drawer.” These were not “classified recordings.” Instead, they were tapes of Clinton’s conversations with author Taylor Branch, and, according to one 2007 news report, Clinton later used these oral history recordings to write his autobiography. The CBS News report said that Clinton “kept the tapes in a sock drawer.””

Branch also wrote a book, published in 2009, based on the tapes, called “The Clinton Tapes: Wrestling History with the President.”

The next year, the conservative group Judicial Watch filed a lawsuit asking a court to require NARA to take custody of the tapes, but NARA said these were “personal records” per the Presidential Records Act. In 2012, a District Court judge dismissed the suit.

Trump said that Bush “lost 22 million White House emails covering the Iraq invasion. ... They’re still looking for those 22 million pages.” It’s true that the Bush administration failed to archive millions of emails, though the 22 million messages were recovered by computer specialists.

A CNN story from December 2009, when a lawsuit brought by two watchdog organizations was settled, explained the issue: “The e-mail controversy dates back to the Bush administration’s 2006 firing of the top federal prosecutors in nine cities. After congressional committees demanded the administration produce documents related to the firings, the White House said millions of e-mails might have been lost from its servers. Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington and the National Security Archive sued over the issue in 2007, arguing the Bush administration violated federal laws that require presidential records to be preserved.”

The emails were from 2003 to 2005. The Iraq War began in March 2003. Under the settlement, 94 days of email records from that period were restored.

Finally, Trump said that both Clinton and Jimmy Carter lost “the nuclear codes.”

Trump said Carter “sent the nuclear codes to his dry cleaner.”

“Nothing happened though,” Trump said. “Nobody said, ‘Oh, we’re going to get him. ... We’re going to prosecute Jimmy Carter.’ He sent the nuclear codes to his dry cleaner. And they never got them back, they’re still looking for them. But they’re looking. How many years ago was that?”

And, Trump said, “Bill Clinton also lost the nuclear codes, and nobody complained.”

According to an article in Timeline in 2017, “In Washington circles, it’s been an open secret that Jimmy Carter inadvertently lost his when a suit was sent to the dry cleaners. Officials would never confirm nor deny those claims.”

In her book “Sleepwalking to Armageddon: The Threat of Nuclear Annihilation,” Helen Caldicott explained that presidents are given a “nuclear biscuit” on their first day in office with a code to verify their identity when talking to the Pentagon war room.

“Some presidents have chosen to keep the ‘biscuit’ on them, though that is not foolproof,” Caldicott, an antinuclear activist, wrote. “Jimmy Carter left his in his clothes when he sent them to the dry cleaners. Bill Clinton had it in his wallet with his credit cards, but then lost the wallet.”

We can’t independently confirm these stories with sources with personal firsthand knowledge, but in any case, they are not comparable to Trump’s situation. These are examples of a sitting president inadvertently misplacing critical classified information. Trump

is being investigated for knowingly withholding presidential documents and classified materials in his private residence more than a year after leaving office, even after receiving several formal requests and a subpoena seeking return of the documents.

“When will they investigate and prosecute Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton, George Bush, and look into what took place with George Bush’s father, and the warehouse of documents had by Barack Hussein Obama?” Trump concluded. “And I don’t think they’ll do it. And you know what, I don’t think they should do it.”

But examples of presidential records being stored by NARA in secured, temporary facilities are not equivalent to the facts surrounding Trump’s case, and not evidence of potential wrongdoing that would result in the kind of criminal investigation that Trump now faces.

Update, Oct. 11: NARA released the [following statement](#) contradicting Trump’s claims: “The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), in accordance with the Presidential Records Act, assumed physical and legal custody of the Presidential records from the administrations of Barack Obama, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George H.W. Bush, and Ronald Reagan, when those Presidents left office. NARA securely moved these records to temporary facilities that NARA leased from the General Services Administration (GSA), near the locations of the future Presidential Libraries that former Presidents built for NARA. All such temporary facilities met strict archival and security standards, and have been managed and staffed exclusively by NARA employees. Reports that indicate or imply that those Presidential records were in the possession of the former Presidents or their representatives, after they left office, or that the records were housed in substandard conditions, are false and misleading.”

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