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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Elayne, you need to be careful of quotes and publication names. It's *really* disconcerting to check a quote in Google and have the only four results be the same column already out there on four websites. I'll send you tracked changes so you can see where I've corrected your sources — I know this is not your best work and know that you would also appreciate knowing that I've fixed these attributions.

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

'Mourning the 'people's house'

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

Historians, preservationists, art lovers, architects, and  
ordinary Americans are distraught over the loss of the East Wing  
of the White House — and furious over the process — as Donald  
Trump creates a massive ballroom

####END SUBHED####

TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

IT WAS BAD ENOUGH when the White House Oval Office  
was suddenly transformed into a fire sale of faux gold decorations

9 dripping from the mantelpiece and every other available space.  
10 Before that it was an elegant room in the White House, lovingly  
11 called the “people’s house,” which has always been recognized  
12 as a National Historic Site.

13 The “Oval” was a warm and elegant place where serious,  
14 important decisions were discussed by dignified, respected  
15 leaders and advisors with strong portfolios who realized the  
16 magnitude of the issues being addressed. Today, sadly, it looks  
17 like a third-rate setting for a Molière comedy.

18 Now comes the devastation of the East Wing.

19 Photos of the desecration of that much loved part of the  
20 White House are a sickening metaphor for the destruction of  
21 democracy we are witnessing. In addition to the building  
22 disappearing, some of us can’t stop wondering what happened to  
23 the artwork, furnishings, historic references, and more that were  
24 housed there. Were these objects treated as debris or simply  
25 looted before the demolition, as other dictators have done?

26 Critics have [compared](#) the demolition of the historic  
27 building to “slashing a Rembrandt.” Betty Ford called the East  
28 Wing the “heart” of the White House. First ladies have worked  
29 from their offices there on important issues ranging from drug  
30 abuse to boosting literacy and preserving the White House itself.

31 In a [commentary](#) in *The Architect’s Newspaper*, a  
32 columnist noted that “The East Wing historically housed the  
33 Office of the First Lady; it seems nothing was done to protect the  
34 history of women’s contributions to the presidency. By bulldozing  
35 the structure, Trump is effectively erasing women from the history  
36 of the White House.”

37 Rosalynn Carter was the original first lady to have an  
38 office in the East Wing. ““I always need a place to go that is  
39 private, where I don’t have to dress and don’t have to put on  
40 makeup,” she wrote in her memoir. “The offices of the staff of the  
41 first lady were always in the East Wing, and it seemed a perfect  
42 place for my office too.”

43 Hillary Clinton became the determined first lady to insist  
44 that her office be in the West Wing because she felt that her staff  
45 needed to be “integrated physically” with the president’s team.  
46 But Michelle Obama worked from the East Wing to support  
47 military families and promote higher education for girls in poor  
48 countries and set a standard as a global role model. And Jill  
49 Biden, who continued teaching while serving as first lady,  
50 advocated for cancer research and women’s health.

51 \* \* \*

52 THE EAST WING was originally known as the East Terrace  
53 in 1902, when Theodore Roosevelt was president. In 1942,  
54 President Franklin D. Roosevelt converted a cloakroom in the  
55 East Terrace into a screening room so that he could watch  
56 newsreels during World War II. Other presidents used the movie  
57 theater to rehearse important speeches including the State of the  
58 Union.

59 FDR created the East Wing as we have known it in 1942  
60 to have more workspace during the war and to conceal an  
61 underground bunker for the president and staff. Today some  
62 people posit that the bunker is the reason the current president  
63 wants to obscure it with a massive structure which,  
64 unsurprisingly, will be named “The Donald J. Trump Ballroom.”

65 They suggest that the ever-paranoid president wants the  
66 bunker to be a safe space for him, one that is well-equipped to  
67 indulge the ultra-right-wing fascist fantasies that he clings to, as  
68 well as for his sycophants who can be directed by their leader as  
69 he advances his autocratic regime.

70 \* \* \*

71 THE IDEA OF a massive ballroom is obscene. It’s also likely  
72 to be illegal, as Trump had ignored proper approvals from the  
73 National Park Service and the National Capital Planning  
74 Commission.

75 It’s an especially heinous Gilded Age insult and an  
76 anomaly in the face of a government shutdown that still affects

77 millions of Americans in numerous and terrible ways. It smacks of  
78 robber barons and “Let them eat cake.”

79 It’s clearly a corrupt moneymaker — an eyesore in the  
80 landscape of Washington and a symbol of the narcissism that is  
81 tearing us apart.

82 No wonder historians, preservationists, art lovers,  
83 architects, and ordinary Americans are distraught, not only for the  
84 loss of this historical building, but for the lack of transparency,  
85 the lying about funding, the underlying corruption, and its  
86 implications — all of which the president chooses to call  
87 “manufactured outrage.”

88 The travesty of such narcissism is stunning.

89 The bottom line is that a ballroom monument to oneself  
90 has no place in the people’s house, now or ever. It’s time to insist  
91 that such acts of ego be stopped.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

92 **ELAYNE CLIFT** ([elayne-clift.com](http://elayne-clift.com)) has written this column  
93 about women, politics, and social issues for almost 20 years.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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