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Notes from editor (not for publication):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

1 'Mourning the 'people's house'

#####END HED#####

#####BEGIN SUBHED#####

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

#####END SUBHED#####

6 TEXT BODY:

#####BEGIN TEXT#####

7 IT WAS BAD ENOUGH when the White House Oval Office
8 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) has written this column
93 about women, politics, and social issues for almost 20 years.

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

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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#####END LOGLINE#####