

Trump's White House renovations fulfill Obama's prediction, kind of

Chris Lamb, Professor of Journalism, Indiana University

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The facade of the East Wing of the White House is seen on Oct. 20, 2025.

Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images

President Barack Obama famously chided Donald Trump in April 2011 during the annual White House correspondents' dinner. The reality show star had repeatedly and falsely claimed that Obama had not been born in the United States and was therefore ineligible to be president.

Trump's demands that Obama release his birth certificate had, in part, made Trump a front-runner among Republican hopefuls for their party's nomination in the following year's presidential election.

Obama referred to Trump's presidential ambitions by joking that, if elected, Trump would bring some changes to the White House.

Obama then called attention to a satirical photo the guests could see of a remodeled White House with the words "Trump" and "The White House" in large purple letters followed by the words "hotel," "casino" and "golf course."

Obama's ridicule of Trump that evening has been credited with inspiring Trump to run for president in 2016.

My book, "The Art of the Political Putdown," includes Obama's chiding of Trump at the correspondents' dinner to demonstrate how politicians use humor to establish superiority over a rival.

Obama's ridicule humiliated Trump, who temporarily dropped the birther conspiracy before reviving it. But Trump may have gotten the last laugh by using the humiliation of that night, as some think, as motivation in his run for the president in 2016.

There is a further twist to Obama joking about Trump's renovations to the White House if Trump became president. Trump has fulfilled Obama's prediction, kind of.

The Trump administration has razed the East Wing, which sits adjacent to the White House, and will replace it with a 90,000-square-foot, gold-encrusted ballroom that appears to reflect the ostentatious tastes of the president.

The US\$300 million ballroom will be twice the size of the White House.

It's expected to be big enough to accommodate nearly a thousand people. Design renderings suggest that the ballroom will resemble the ballroom at Mar-a-Lago, the president's private estate in Palm Beach, Florida.

"I don't have any plan to call it after myself," Trump said recently. "That was fake news. Probably going to call it the presidential ballroom or something like that. We haven't really thought about a name yet."

But senior administration officials told ABC News that they were already referring to the structure as "The President Donald J. Trump Ballroom."

The renovation will have neither a hotel, casino nor golf course, as Obama mentioned in his light-hearted speech at the 2011 correspondents' dinner.



A video is shown as President Barack Obama speaks about Donald Trump at the White House Correspondents' Association dinner in Washington on April 30, 2011.

AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta

Obama pokes fun at Trump

In the months before the 2011 correspondents' dinner, Trump had repeatedly claimed that Obama had not been born in Hawaii but had instead been born outside the United States, perhaps in his father's home country of Kenya.

The baseless conspiracy theory became such a distraction that Obama released his long-form birth certificate in April 2011.

Three days later, Obama delivered his speech at the correspondents' dinner with Trump in the audience, where he said that Trump, having put the birther conspiracy behind him, could move to other conspiracy theories like claims the moon landing was staged, aliens landed in Roswell, New Mexico, or the unsolved murders of rappers Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur.

"Did we fake the moon landing?" Obama said. "What really happened at Roswell? And where are Biggie and Tupac?"

Obama then poked fun at Trump's reality show, "The Apprentice," and referred to how Trump, who owned hotels, casinos and golf courses, might renovate the White House.

When Obama was finished, Seth Meyers, the host of the dinner, made additional jokes at Trump's expense.

"Donald Trump has been saying that he will run for president as a Republican – which is surprising, since I just assumed that he was running as a joke," Meyers said.

Trump gets the last laugh

The New Yorker magazine writer Adam Gopnik remembered watching Trump as the jokes kept coming at his expense.

“Trump’s humiliation was as absolute, and as visible, as any I have ever seen: his head set in place, like a man on a pillory, he barely moved or altered his expression as wave after wave of laughter struck him,” Gopnik wrote. “There was not a trace of feigning good humor about him.”



Donald Trump and Melania Trump arrive for the White House correspondents’ dinner in Washington on April 30, 2011.

AP Photo/Alex Brandon, File

Roger Stone, one of Trump’s top advisers, said Trump decided to run for president after he felt he had been publicly humiliated.

“I think that is the night he resolves to run for president,” Stone said in an interview with the PBS program “Frontline.” “I think that he is kind of motivated by it. ‘Maybe I’ll just run. Maybe I’ll show them all.’”

Trump, if Stone and other political observers are correct, sought the presidency to avenge that humiliation.

“I thought, ‘Oh, Barack Obama is starting something that I don’t know if he’ll be able to finish,’” said Omarosa Manigault, a former “Apprentice” contestant who became Trump’s director of African American outreach during his first term.

“Every critic, every detractor, will have to bow down to President Trump,” she said. “It is everyone who’s ever doubted Donald, whoever disagreed, whoever challenged him – it is the ultimate revenge to become the most powerful man in the universe.”

The notoriously thin-skinned Trump did not attend the White House correspondents’ dinner during his first presidency. He also did not attend the dinner during the first year of his second presidency.

Although Trump has never publicly acknowledged the importance of that event in 2011, a number of people have noted how pivotal it was, demonstrating how the putdown can be a powerful weapon in politics – even, perhaps, extending to tearing down the White House’s East Wing.

Chris Lamb does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

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