

It's been 263 days since Hillary Clinton last held a press conference. That's a dangerous precedent.

By [Chris Cillizza](#) August 24

Robby Mook, Hillary Clinton's campaign manager, appeared on "Morning Joe" on Wednesday morning. Former Bush White House communications director Nicolle Wallace asked him about the fact that it had been more than 260 days since the candidate last held a news conference with reporters. Here's the full exchange:

WALLACE: I used to work on campaigns and — and I would look at this as your candidate's number one vulnerability is the fact that, again, someone as flawed as Donald Trump, she has a double-digit deficit on the question of honesty and trustworthiness.

Isn't the antidote to this to sit her down today in front of your traveling press corps people like Andrea Mitchell, who certainly can appreciate the contributions of people like Melinda Gates and — and others, and let her take questions until there are no more questions to be answered?

MOOK: Well, first of all, Hillary's done over 300 interviews this year alone.

WALLACE: I'm not — I didn't talk about — and I know the difference between a three minute ground-ruled interview and a press conference because I — I've put on a couple of each. But why wouldn't you have her do a press conference today just to — you — you have a perception problem on the question of honesty and trustworthiness, why wouldn't you put her out there to your traveling press corps who knows all the intricacies of sort of the defense you laid out, which is — which is legitimate? But this is about the perception.

Why wouldn't you put her out there to answer questions that she could certainly handle if — if your defense is true?

MOOK: Well, we are — she is out there answering questions.

WALLACE: She's going to do a press conference today?

MOOK: As I said, she — she's done over 300 interviews this year — and she — she takes questions in a variety of formats and we're going to — we're going to keep looking at that.

A few things:

1. I don't doubt Mook's numbers on how many interviews Clinton has granted over the past year. But as Wallace notes, sitdown, one-on-one interviews aren't the same thing as a free-wheeling press conference. There are lots and lots of ground rules that govern sit-downs — most notably a typically strict time limit that makes pursuing any particular line of questioning in any real depth almost impossible. And then there is the fact that an interview with, say, Jimmy Kimmel, isn't the same thing as a press conference with reporters from The Washington Post, New York Times and the TV networks. Kimmel is a comedian, not a reporter.
2. The idea that "she is out there answering questions" is so nebulous as to be meaningless. From whom? About what? And it's worth noting here that Clinton — unlike President Obama — does not allow reporters into her fundraising events, meaning that if major donors are asking her questions, we have no idea (a) what they are and (b) how she answers them.
3. "We're going to keep looking at that" = "We aren't going to do anything." (I have a political spin translator. It's almost ready for public launch.)

Look, Mook is in a tough spot. The reason Clinton hasn't done a press conference since Dec. 5, 2015, is because she doesn't want to. She's not great in that format and knows it. Need proof? Her presser at the United Nations aiming to explain her private email server didn't go so well.

I am under no illusion that even if Clinton doesn't give a press conference all the way through the election — a span of 339 days — lots and lots of voters will make their minds up based on this issue alone. They won't.

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But it's beyond debate that Clinton has honesty and trustworthiness issues with the general public. In an August WaPo-ABC poll, 62 percent of voters said Clinton was neither honest nor trustworthy. (That number includes 69 percent of independents who say Clinton isn't honest or trustworthy.)

Refusing to hold a press conference plays into that distrust — and might even magnify it.

But put even the political calculation aside. Clinton is, without question, the favorite as of today to be elected the 45th president

of the United States come November. Given that, she owes it to the public to demonstrate how she thinks on her feet and how she responds to unwanted or tough questions. The best — and maybe only — way to do that is via press conferences. Simply avoiding them because (a) Clinton doesn't like them and (b) Trump continues to generate day-dominating negative headlines isn't a good excuse when we are talking about someone who is running to be the most powerful person in the world.

There's a responsibility that comes with the job Clinton is running for — a responsibility that goes beyond simply winning. Clinton's resistance to any real engagement with the media in the campaign sets a dangerous precedent for how accountable and transparent she might be as president.

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