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MVP: Gibson Dunn's Ted Boutrous

By **Theresa Schliep**

Law360 (November 4, 2026, 4:00 PM EST) -- Ted Boutrous of Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP worked numerous high-profile cases involving the media and public figures this year, including The New York Times in its challenge to the Pentagon's restrictions on journalists and NPR in its funding fight, earning him a spot as one of the 2026 Law360 Media & Entertainment MVPs.



Biggest accomplishment over the last year:

Among the various prominent cases that Boutrous took on over the past 12 months, he identified "the string of victories in connection with efforts by the Trump administration to throttle freedom of the press" as his most significant accomplishment.

Those cases include challenges by The New York Times and journalist Julian Barnes to Pentagon rules that broadly limit reporters' access to the building. In September 2025, the U.S. Department of Defense, under the leadership of Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, imposed a policy requiring journalists to forgo soliciting confidential information or else risk losing their press credentials.

A variety of news outlets gave up their credentials in response, and Boutrous represented The Times and Barnes in their suit challenging the action. U.S. District Judge Paul L. Friedman issued an opinion in March 2026 saying the current policy was unconstitutional viewpoint discrimination, "full stop."

Shortly after that order, the Pentagon issued new rules for journalists that required they be accompanied by escorts when they were at the Defense Department building. Judge Friedman again sided with The Times, finding in a June 2026 opinion that the news organization was likely to succeed with its arguments that the new policy was in retaliation for its reporting and for its success in the initial lawsuit.

The federal government is appealing that case to the D.C. Circuit.

Then there's Boutrous' representation of National Public Radio in its successful suit taking on an executive order from President Donald Trump that sought to hold back funding from NPR and PBS. U.S.

District Judge Randolph D. Moss said in an order in March that, even if the public broadcasters aren't entitled to funding, they can't be defunded as retaliation for protected speech.

More recently, Boutrous has represented CNN, Politico and MS Now in their fight against the White House's ban of their journalists from entering the White House. The Trump administration is going to the D.C. Circuit with an appeal of U.S. District Judge Timothy J. Kelly's preliminary injunction ordering the reinstatement of their journalists' press passes.

Biggest challenge in the past year:

While these victories are Boutrous' most significant in the past year, they also posed the most significant challenges for him. Historically, the courts have been more willing to accept the government's view on things without significantly probing its claims, and have been less inclined to interfere in the president's prerogatives, Boutrous noted.

"The law is so clearly on our side on First Amendment grounds in all three of these cases," Boutrous said. "But you always have that extra burden when one of the defendants is the president of the United States and courts are naturally sensitive to not intruding and doing something that would actually interfere with the president's duties."

In some of these cases, Boutrous and the news organizations have argued that the courts don't always have to take the Trump administration at its word. For instance, the news organizations in the White House ban case have contended that the administration sought to come up with national security justifications for the policy after it had been rolled out, while at the same time the president was posting on social media that the policy was in response to what he called their negative coverage of him.

In the preliminary injunction in the CNN, Politico and MS Now case, Judge Kelly cited a line from a U.S. Supreme Court precedent saying it's "not required to exhibit a naiveté from which ordinary citizens are free."

"I think that is a sign that the courts have lost patience and view that they have more power to scrutinize closely what the president and the administration do," Boutrous said.

At the same time, the president's public statements about these policies have bolstered the lawsuits because of how explicit they are, Boutrous argued.

Proudest moment in the past year:

Attorneys often have to wait some time to see some results in the cases they take on, and those results aren't always pretty. But in the case of Boutrous' representation of the news organizations, he and his team were able to get quick and very tangible results for his clients. He said it was that "immediate gratification by the law" that made him most proud.

For example, in the White House press ban case, on the day the temporary restraining order came out, Boutrous was in a different time zone, awake at 3 a.m. ET, sending instructions to the associates at Gibson Dunn to run to the White House with the TRO to secure the reporters' press passes.

"Visually and verbally witnessing the actual results was very satisfying," he said, adding that to "help vindicate the First Amendment rights of journalists, that was very gratifying."

Why he's a media and entertainment attorney:

Boutrous said he's gotten where he is because of his passion for journalism and the First Amendment and the strength of Gibson Dunn in that area.

"When I started at the firm, I really wanted to do First Amendment work," he said. "I've always been a real admirer of journalists."

Boutrous got his "lucky break" with Gibson Dunn, given the strength of the attorneys working there on these matters, he said. He worked with U.S. Circuit Judge Robert D. Sack, who worked for over a decade at Gibson Dunn and counted media organizations among his clients before his appointment to the Second Circuit in 1998.

Other influential Gibson Dunn attorneys were Theodore B. Olson, who between stints in government, including as solicitor general in the Bush administration from 2001 through 2004, was a partner at the firm, as well as Robert S. Warren, who was a partner at Gibson Dunn for decades.

"Our firm has a long history in [media and entertainment], representing entertainment companies, filmmakers, actors and the like going back 100 years at least," Boutrous said.

What motivates him:

Boutrous said that it's important for people to have access to quality information. That mission motivates him, he said.

"We're really just trying to get information to the public so citizens can make decisions about how to govern themselves and the like," he said. "I think it's really important, whatever your politics are, to have that free and open debate."

As for his work with artists and others working in entertainment, Boutrous noted that lawsuits can interfere in the work of creative people.

"Being able to stop those lawsuits and protect those clients so they can do their creative work is really inspirational," Boutrous said.

Other notable cases he's worked on:

In addition to the litigation involving the federal government, Boutrous has worked on a number of prominent defamation cases, including his successful defense of NBC in a lawsuit by embattled music mogul Diddy over a documentary about him, as well as his representation of Warner Bros. Discovery and the makers of the "Quiet on Set" docuseries in an action by one of the work's subjects, Nickelodeon producer Dan Schneider. A California appellate court in September sided with the defendants in that case.

Boutrous said that defamation litigation has become a popular tool for public figures to wield against journalists, documentarians and other creators. The courts are getting a lot of these issues right, Boutrous said, but sometimes the process is punishment enough.

"Even if you win, if you're a news organization or a filmmaker or a journalist, the costs, the stress, the

time that it takes to deal with it really is part of the punishment of the lawsuits filed in the first place, and can chill First Amendment activity," he said.

--As told to Theresa Schliep. Editing by Patrick Reagan.

Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2026 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 1,000 submissions.

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