

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 24, 2025

The Honorable Brendan Carr  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
45 L St NE  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Carr:

We are writing with grave concern regarding your agency's role in what can only be described as an unprecedented, purposeful assault on press freedom and the First Amendment. ABC's decision on September 17, 2025, to remove Jimmy Kimmel's program following your implicit threats to revoke its broadcast license represents a dangerous watershed moment for free speech in America.

On September 17, 2025, you appeared on the *The Benny Show* podcast and called on licensed broadcasters to “push back on Comcast and Disney” and preempt coverage of *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, you warned that continuing to broadcast the program could result in “fines or license revocation from the FCC.”<sup>2</sup> You then delivered what can only be described as an ultimatum to broadcasters: “We can do this the easy way or the hard way. These companies can find ways to change conduct and take action, frankly, on Kimmel or there’s going to be additional work for the FCC ahead.”<sup>3</sup>

The chilling effects of your public comments are evident in ABC's response. While Disney reversed course on September 22, 2025, stating that *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* will return to air following “thoughtful conversations,” the timing of your threats and the broader pattern of government intimidation make clear that broadcasters were operating under extraordinary duress.<sup>4</sup> According to reports, senior executives at ABC, Disney, and their affiliates convened emergency meetings following your statements.<sup>5</sup> Multiple sources indicated that executives’ fear of retaliation from the Trump administration was the decisive factor, ultimately leading to the direct censorship of constitutionally protected speech. Meanwhile, Nexstar Media Group – while seeking FCC approval for a \$6.2 billion acquisition – and Sinclair Broadcast Group – also lobbying for favorable regulatory treatment from the FCC in its review of its broadcast business – quickly reacted to your intimidations by preempting *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* on their stations.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Kash Patel Testifying LIVE Now on Charlie Kirk Assassin | Dark Texts With Trans Boyfriend Released...with Guests FCC Chairman Brendan Carr, Mike Davis and Rep. Eli Crane,” *The Benny Show*, (September 17, 2025), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dNxPINQdcs&list=PL6uIpJ3rdacmcmNoDFIRSLHbcoklgsM\\_W&index=2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dNxPINQdcs&list=PL6uIpJ3rdacmcmNoDFIRSLHbcoklgsM_W&index=2).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> Peter White, *Jimmy Kimmel Is Back: ABC Returning Late-Night Show On Tuesday, Deadline* (September 22, 2025), <https://deadline.com/2025/09/jimmy-kimmel-returning-abc-1236552451/>.

<sup>5</sup> Charisma Madarang, Asawin Suebsaeng, and Andrew Perez, *‘Jimmy Kimmel Live!’ Pulled ‘Indefinitely’ by ABC Over Charlie Kirk Comments*, *Rolling Stone* (September 17, 2025), <https://www.rollingstone.com/tv-movies/tv-movie-news/jimmy-kimmel-out-abc-charlie-kirk-comments-1235430078/>.

<sup>6</sup> Ted Johnson and Dade Hayes, *Nexstar And Sinclair, Two Largest Station Groups, Wield Influence In ABC Decision To Pull Jimmy Kimmel In Light Of His Charlie Kirk Comments* (September 17, 2025), <https://deadline.com/2025/09/nexstar-jimmy-kimmel-charlie-kirk-1236547382/>.

This fear parallels the same alarm you previously expressed regarding potential action by the FCC to censor disfavored speech. On several prior occasions, you warned of the “chilling transgression of the free speech rights that every media outlet in this country enjoys”<sup>7</sup> and applauded political satire as “one of the oldest and most important forms of free speech.”<sup>8</sup>

Your latest statements are part of a broad pattern of government coercion of the press emboldened by President Trump and your leadership at the FCC, and designed to intimidate and silence critical coverage of the Administration. On July 17, 2025, CBS announced plans to cancel *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, just one day after Paramount paid President Trump \$16 million to settle a frivolous lawsuit in time to ensure the FCC approved their \$8 billion merger with Skydance.<sup>9</sup> President Trump has also filed a \$15 billion suit against the New York Times, claiming a series of articles “sought to undermine” the President’s reputation,<sup>10</sup> and a \$10 billion lawsuit against the Wall Street Journal over its reporting on his ties to Jeffrey Epstein.<sup>11</sup>

This apparent intimidation has achieved the intended effect. ABC News paid a \$15 million settlement plus \$1 million in attorney’s fees before Trump even returned to office, likely an effort to mitigate future retaliation from the President.<sup>12</sup> Meta paid \$25 million to settle a lawsuit over the President’s account suspension after the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, also just days into Trump’s second term.<sup>13</sup> The administration has also moved to defund public media, with an executive order cutting funding to PBS and NPR on claims of “biased and partisan news coverage.”<sup>14</sup> It pushed a rescissions package to claw back \$1.1 billion in previously approved funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting<sup>15</sup> and removed The Associated Press from the White House press room after the organization refused to adopt the administration’s preferred terminology.<sup>16</sup> Even private media ownership has bent to pressure, with Jeff Bezos dramatically shifting the Washington Post’s editorial direction in

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<sup>7</sup> “FCC Commissioner Carr Responds to Democrats’ Efforts to Censor Newsrooms,” FCC News (February 22, 2021), <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-370165A1.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> @BrendanCarrFCC, X (May 2, 2022), <https://x.com/BrendanCarrFCC/status/1521117482303602689>.

<sup>9</sup> John Koblin, *CBS Canceling ‘Late Show With Stephen Colbert’ After Next Season*, The New York Times (July 17, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/17/business/stephen-colbert-late-show-ending.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Daisuke Wakabayashi and Michael M. Grynbaum, *Trump Sues The New York Times for Articles Questioning His Success*, The New York Times (September 16, 2025) <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/16/business/media/trump-lawsuit-new-york-times.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Alanna Durkin Richer, Larry Neumeister, and Jill Colvin, *Trump sues Wall Street Journal and Rupert Murdoch over story reporting on Epstein ties*, PBS News (July 19, 2025), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trump-sues-wall-street-journal-and-rupert-murdoch-over-story-reporting-on-epstein-ties>.

<sup>12</sup> Paula Reid and Katelyn Polantz, *ABC News settles defamation suit with Trump for \$15 million*, CNN (December 14, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2024/12/14/politics/trump-abc-news-defamation-lawsuit-settle/index.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Zeke Miller and Aamer Madhani, *Meta agrees to pay \$25 million to settle lawsuit from Trump after Jan. 6 suspension*, (January 29, 2025), <https://apnews.com/article/trump-meta-settlement-zuckerberg-capitol-riot-9939e52679364080c983e0cab739b805>.

<sup>14</sup> Executive Order, “Ending Taxpayer Subsidization of Biased Media,” The White House, (May 1, 2025), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/05/ending-taxpayer-subsidization-of-biased-media/>.

<sup>15</sup> Scott Neuman and Frank Langfitt, *Corporation for Public Broadcasting says it’s shutting down*, NPR (August 1, 2025), <https://www.npr.org/2025/08/01/nx-s1-5489808/cpb-shut-down-public-broadcasting-trump>.

<sup>16</sup> David Bauder, *White House bars AP reporter from Oval Office because of AP style policy on ‘Gulf of America’*, The Associated Press (February 12, 2025), <https://apnews.com/article/trump-ap-journalism-first-amendment-8a83d8b506053249598e807f8e91e1ae>.

what many view as capitulation to the President.<sup>17</sup> Viewed collectively, these actions represent the most blatant and coordinated attack on the free press in American history.

As Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, you hold a position of extraordinary trust and responsibility. The FCC's regulatory authority over broadcast licenses was never intended to serve as a weapon to silence criticism or punish satirical commentary. Your agency's mission is to serve the public interest, not to act as an enforcement arm for political retribution against media outlets that displease those in power.

In order to fulfill Congress's constitutional obligation to perform oversight of regulatory agencies, we request responses to the following questions no later than October 1, 2025:

1. Have you, the Commission, or FCC staff had any communications with representatives of ABC, Disney, or any of their affiliates concerning specific programming content decisions, including *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* or other programs in the last 30 days?
  - a. If so, please name all individuals involved in those communications and provide the dates and documentation of all such communication.
2. Have you, the Commission, or FCC staff ever discussed with any media executives the potential consequences for their broadcast licenses, should they continue to air programming critical of the administration?
  - a. If so, please name all individuals involved in those communications and provide the dates and documentation of all such communication.
3. Did you, the Commission, or FCC staff have any communications with the President or any of his associates, including any officials or employees of the White House, regarding *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* or other ABC/Disney programs prior to your September 17, 2025, remarks on *The Benny Show*?
  - a. If so, please name all individuals involved in those communications and provide the dates and documentation of all such communication.
4. What specific statutory authority, if any, do you believe empowers the FCC to revoke a broadcaster's license or impose fines on the basis of satirical or critical content?
5. Has the FCC opened any investigations into broadcasters related to the airing of late-night comedy or political satire programs?
  - a. If so, please provide details of each investigation, including the initiating authority, scope, and current status.
6. Has your agency consulted with the Department of Justice or any other federal agency regarding the legal or constitutional basis for sanctioning broadcasters based on their content?

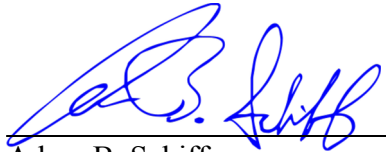
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<sup>17</sup> David Folkenflik, *Jeff Bezos' revamp of 'Washington Post' opinions leads editor to quit*, NPR (February 26, 2025), <https://www.npr.org/2025/02/26/nx-s1-5309725/jeff-bezos-washington-post-opinion-section>.

- a. If so, provide the dates of and participants in such consultations.
7. How does the FCC justify its threats to revoke broadcast licenses over critical programming given the First Amendment's prohibition on government retaliation against protected speech?
8. Do you acknowledge that threatening broadcast license revocation or fines for airing content deemed critical of the government risks creating a chilling effect on protected speech?
9. What specific safeguards will the Commission implement to ensure that broadcasters are not pressured to self-censor content critical of the President or other elected officials?

We look forward to reviewing your responses.

Sincerely,



Adam B. Schiff  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Angela D. Alsobrooks  
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Jack Reed  
United States Senator



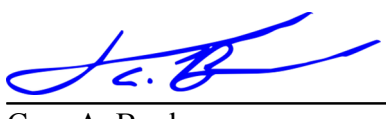
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Ruben Gallego  
United States Senator



Patty Murray  
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator