

United States Senate

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410

August 18, 2025

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

Dear Chairman Carr:

I am writing to clarify the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) terms and conditions for approving the recent the \$8 billion merger between Paramount Global and Skydance Media, including any role played by President Trump or his associates in influencing the FCC's actions. The sequence of actions and statements leading up to and following the FCC's merger approval, including Paramount's \$16 million settlement with President Trump just days before the FCC issued its approval, raises significant questions and alarm that the FCC – an independent regulatory agency – has become a vehicle for President Trump to exact personal retribution and undermine the freedom of the press. Oversight by Congress is therefore imperative to assess the FCC's actions and the circumstances surrounding the approval, which, if influenced by President Trump, would set a dangerous precedent of political interference in and corruption of the FCC's merger approval process.

As you are aware, the FCC's authority – and its limits – are rooted in the First Amendment.¹ The Communications Act of 1934 explicitly declares that nothing in the statute “shall be understood or construed to give the Commission the power of censorship over the [broadcast] communications or signals transmitted by any [broadcast] station, and no regulation or condition shall be promulgated or fixed by the Commission which shall interfere with the right of free speech by means of [over-the-air] broadcast communication.”² As such, the FCC does not have the authority to dictate editorial content, punish perceived political bias, compel or silence specific viewpoints, or reward parties on the basis of efforts to garner favor with elected officials.

On July 1, 2025, Paramount announced it had agreed to pay \$16 million to settle a lawsuit – which legal experts had deemed as “frivolous” – brought by the President over a “60 minutes” interview with then-candidate for President Kamala Harris aired by CBS News.³ Furthermore, President Trump has claimed that the deal includes “\$20 Million Dollars more from the new Owners, in Advertising, public service announcements, or similar Programming, for a total of over \$36 Million Dollars.”⁴ You subsequently met privately with Skydance CEO David Ellison on July 15, 2025, just over a week before the FCC approved the merger between Paramount and Skydance on July 24, 2025.⁵ You noted in the Commission's press

¹ U.S. Const. amend. I.

² See 47 U.S.C § 326.

³ CBS News, *Paramount, President Trump reach \$16 million settlement over "60 Minutes" lawsuit* (July 2, 2025), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/paramount-trump-60-minutes-lawsuit-settlement/>.

⁴ Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), *Truth Social* (July 22, 2025, 2:10 PM), <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/114898229237459086>.

⁵ Ted Johnson, *Skydance's David Ellison Meets With FCC Chairman Brendan Carr To Discuss Paramount Merger And Company's "Commitment to Unbiased Journalism"* (July 18, 2025), <https://deadline.com/2025/07/david-ellison-fcc-skydance-paramount-merger-1236462443/>.

release announcing the merger that this approval was conditioned on Skydance’s “written commitments to ensure that the new company’s programming embodies a diversity of viewpoints from across the political and ideological spectrum” to “eliminate invidious forms of DEI discrimination”⁶ – statements that suggest an active effort by the FCC to shape the company’s future programming content in alignment with President Trump’s criticism of Paramount prior to the deal,⁷ despite the FCC’s legal prohibition from doing so. In response, Commissioner Anna M. Gomez stated in her dissent to the approval of the transfer of control of Paramount Global, “this once-independent FCC used its vast power to pressure Paramount to broker a private legal settlement and further erode press freedom.”⁸ Commissioner Gomez also expressed concern about the FCC imposing unprecedented controls over newsroom decisions and editorial judgment, which directly violate the First Amendment and the law.⁹

The FCC’s recent actions are especially troubling considering President Trump’s history of disparaging the press and undermining the protections afforded to them by the Constitution. He has repeatedly accused news agencies of bias or unfair reporting when the coverage is unfavorable to him, most recently stating that licenses for networks that he views as “political pawns for the Democrat Party...could, and should be revoked!”¹⁰ In a blatant example of Trump’s political interference in the FCC’s regulatory review, the President boasted on Truth Social about his “BIG AND IMPORTANT WIN” against Paramount just two days before the Commission’s approval of the company’s merger with Skydance.¹¹ The President went on to name several other respected media outlets, announcing he was putting them “ON NOTICE” and signaling his intent to continue weaponizing litigation and regulatory review as a tool to intimidate the press across the media landscape.¹² In an early display of your willingness to abuse the FCC’s authority according to President Trump’s whims, you inappropriately reinstated complaints against networks regularly scrutinized by President Trump while leaving untouched the dismissal of a similar complaint involving Fox News.¹³

In order to fulfill Congress’s constitutional obligation to perform oversight of regulatory agencies, I request responses to the following questions by August 25, 2025:

1. What was the stated purpose of your July 15, 2025, meeting with David Ellison, and when was this meeting first proposed?
 - a. In this meeting, did any participants raise or otherwise discuss programming, editorial commitments, or content oversight? If so, please clarify in specific detail.

⁶ Federal Communications Commission, *FCC Approves Skydance’s Acquisition of Paramount CBS* (July 24, 2025), <https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-approves-skydances-acquisition-paramount-cbs>.

⁷ Amanda Friedman, *Trump renews attacks on CBS’ ‘60 Minutes’ amid mediation talks for lawsuit* (April 30, 2025), <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/04/30/trump-cbs-60-minutes-00317969>; Dominick Mastrangelo, *Trump ramps up criticism of ‘60 Minutes’ Harris interview amid lawsuit* (May 7, 2025), <https://thehill.com/homenews/media/5287316-donald-trump-criticism-60-minutes/>.

⁸ Dissenting Statement of Commissioner Anna M. Gomez, *In re Applications for Consent to the Transfer of Control of Paramount Global*, MB Docket No. 24-275 (July 24, 2025), <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-25-43A2.pdf>

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), *Truth Social* (July 26, 2025, 8:14 PM), <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/114922310106523572>.

¹¹ Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), *Truth Social* (July 22, 2025, 2:10 PM), <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/114898229237459086>.

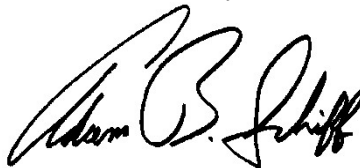
¹² *Id.*

¹³ Ted Johson, *New FCC Chair Revives Complaints About ABC, CBS And NBC Content That His Predecessor Rejected As “At Odds With The First Amendment”* (January 22, 2025), <https://deadline.com/2025/01/fcc-complaints-trump-cbs-nbc-abc-1236263995/>.

2. Did you, the Commission, or FCC staff have any communications with Skydance or Paramount representatives concerning specific programming content decisions, including “The Late Show with Stephen Colbert” or other shows, during the merger review process?
3. What specific legal or regulatory authority did the FCC rely upon to condition merger approval on changes to editorial review practices at Skydance?
4. 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 the conditions or approval of the merger?
 - a. If so, please name all individuals involved in those communications.
5. Did the President or any of his associates, including any officials or employees of the White House, ever directly or indirectly communicate to you, the Commission, or FCC staff that the approval of the merger should be conditioned on any commitments from Paramount Global or Skydance Media related to programming content or media coverage?
6. What First Amendment analysis did the Commission conduct prior to accepting Skydance’s commitment to achieve editorial “balance”?
7. Did the FCC have any knowledge of, or communications with, the White House, Skydance, or Paramount concerning a potential \$20 million public service announcement or advertising commitment connected to the settlement or merger approval?
8. What safeguards does the FCC have in place to insulate the Commission from external political pressure in the review of future merger applications? What additional safeguards are needed?

I look forward to reviewing your responses.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adam B. Schiff". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Adam" and last name "Schiff" being clearly legible, and "B." in the middle.

Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator