

United States Senate

May 7, 2026

The Honorable Brendan Carr
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street, N.E.
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Carr,

The Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) order, sent at your directive, to The Walt Disney Company to file early license renewals for its eight ABC broadcast stations — coming just one day after President Donald Trump publicly demanded ABC fire late-night host Jimmy Kimmel — is an extraordinary abuse of power. This order is the latest and most extreme step in your use of the FCC's licensing authority as a cudgel against broadcasters whose editorial choices displease the President. You have effectively converted the FCC's authority over the public airwaves into an instrument of presidential retribution against constitutionally protected speech. The FCC must immediately rescind this order and explain its conduct.

The FCC order, sent under your leadership, appears to be a blatant effort to punish Disney for its editorial decision-making, notably its refusal to fire Kimmel over a recent joke. On Monday last week, both President Trump¹ and First Lady Melania Trump² demanded that Disney fire Kimmel over his joke — speech clearly protected under the First Amendment. One day later, you directed the FCC to send the early-renewal order³ to Disney — reportedly surprising FCC career staff.⁴ Although the three-paragraph order did not mention Kimmel's joke or Trump's comments, the timing speaks volumes. This action appears to penalize Disney for refusing to capitulate to Trump's demands to fire Kimmel and to send a message to other broadcasters: Modify your speech to favor Trump or face the FCC's wrath. Moreover, with the exception of a different order on Monday of last week⁵ — possibly timed to give you cover for the Disney order that would come the next day — the FCC appears not to have used its authority⁶ to call in licenses for early renewal in over half a century, and it has never invoked that authority to target

¹ Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Truth Social (Apr. 27, 2026 1:26 PM), <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/116477838570626860>.

² Melania Trump (@FLOTUS), X (Apr. 27, 2026 10:19 AM), <https://x.com/FLOTUS/status/2048769128513585618>.

³ Federal Communications Commission Order DA 26-416, In the Matter of The Walt Disney Company et al. (Apr. 28, 2026), <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-26-416A1.pdf>.

⁴ Kelcee Griffis & Saijel Kishan, *ABC License Renewal Call Surprised FCC Staff and Shattered Norms*, Bloomberg (Apr. 29, 2026), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-04-29/abc-license-renewal-call-surprised-fcc-staff-and-shattered-norms>.

⁵ FCC Order DA 26-413, In the Matter of Bridge News, LLC (Apr. 27, 2026), <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-26-413A1.pdf>.

⁶ 47 CFR § 73.3539(c).

constitutionally protected speech or satisfy a president's personal vendetta against a company.⁷ The Disney early-renewal order is thus an unprecedented and unconstitutional abuse of the Commission's powers.

The Trump administration's sustained, public campaign against Disney also lays bare the pretextual and politically motivated nature of this order. Over the past 18 months, President Trump and you have repeatedly threatened Disney, ABC, and its stations for engaging in constitutionally protected speech. In January 2025, just a few days after you became FCC chairman, the FCC reinstated a frivolous complaint against ABC based on its moderation of a 2024 presidential debate.⁸ Over the following months, President Trump repeatedly called on the FCC to revoke licenses from broadcasters because of their news coverage, including licenses of ABC stations.⁹ And then in September 2025, you told a podcast host — following a different joke from Kimmel that angered Trump and his allies — that Disney and ABC could “do this the easy way or the hard way,” and said that “there's going to be additional work for the FCC ahead” unless ABC affiliates “find ways to change conduct and take action, frankly, on Kimmel[.]”¹⁰ This mafia boss threat provoked a bipartisan backlash but your message was clear: the FCC, with you as chairman, was ready to serve as Trump's speech police.

The campaign against Disney and its editorial decision-making, culminating in last week's early-renewal order, is an egregious abuse of power and a clear violation of the First Amendment. Although the FCC has the authority to ensure broadcasters operate in the public interest, it cannot serve as President Trump's roving censor, threatening to revoke licenses against broadcasters whose editorial content — including a comedian's jokes — displeases the President. In fact, before serving as chairman, you frequently recognized the importance of the First Amendment and the freedom of speech, including for comedians. As you previously explained: “From Internet memes to late-night comedians, from cartoons to the plays and poems as old as organized government itself - Political Satire circumvents traditional gatekeepers & helps hold those in power accountable. Not surprising that it's long been targeted for censorship.”¹¹ Now, you are doing exactly that — targeting political satire for censorship.

⁷ Although the FCC does not have a public list of early-renewal orders, a petition to the Commission in 2018 indicated that the agency last called in licenses for early renewal in 1972. *See* Petition to Require Filing of Early Renewal Applications, American Cable Association (Nov. 26, 2018) 4 n.9 (identifying just three early-renewal orders in the past 75 years, the last coming in 1972). This letter seeks to confirm that early-renewal record.

⁸ *See, e.g.*, David Shepardson, *FCC reinstates complaints against ABC, CBS and NBC for 2024 election coverage*, Reuters (Jan. 23, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/fcc-reinstates-complaints-over-abc-presidential-debate-harris-tv-appearances-2025-01-22/>.

⁹ *See, e.g.*, Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Truth Social (Aug. 24, 2025, 9:59 PM), <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/115086929873163909>.

¹⁰ *See, e.g.*, Gene Maddaus, *FCC Chairman Threatens ABC Over Jimmy Kimmel's Remarks About Charlie Kirk's Killer*, Variety (Sept. 17, 2025), <https://variety.com/2025/tv/news/brendan-carr-abc-fcc-jimmy-kimmel-charlie-kirk-1236522406/>.

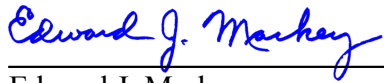
¹¹ Brendan Carr (@BrendanCarrFCC), X (Feb. 20, 2020, 10:18 PM), <https://x.com/BrendanCarrFCC/status/1230693195828400129>.

You should direct the FCC to immediately rescind the order calling in Disney's ABC station licenses for early renewal. To help the public understand your basis for this action, please respond in writing to the following questions by May 21, 2026:

1. Please describe the timing and process by which you determined that the Commission should issue the early-renewal order.
 - a. When did you first direct Commission staff to begin drafting the Disney order, and on what date was the final text approved for release?
 - b. What internal legal review, including by the Office of General Counsel, was conducted before the order was issued?
 - c. Did you consider, but reject, any less aggressive enforcement steps prior to issuing the order? If so, please identify them.
 - d. The Commission issued a procedurally similar early-renewal order against Bridge News, LLC on April 27, 2026 — one day before the Disney order. Did you intentionally time the orders so that the Bridge News order would precede the Disney order in the public record?
2. Please provide a status update on each open FCC investigation into Disney or its ABC stations.
 - a. When was Disney's last response to each of these inquiries, and how many pages of documents has Disney produced as part of these investigations?
 - b. Has Disney been unresponsive to these investigations?
 - c. Please describe the justification for issuing the early-renewal order amidst these ongoing investigations.
3. Between April 22, 2026, and April 28, 2026, did you, your staff, or any other FCC personnel communicate with the White House, any other component of the Executive Office of the President, or any individual acting on their behalf regarding Disney, ABC, Jimmy Kimmel, or the early-renewal order? If so, please describe each communication, including the participants and substance.
4. Please identify each prior instance in which the Commission has invoked 47 CFR § 73.3539(c) to call in the licenses of a broadcaster for early renewal, including a summary of the grounds for each instance.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



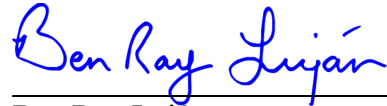
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator




Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



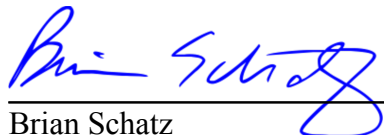
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Chairman Carr

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The Honorable Anna M. Gomez

Commissioner

Federal Communications Commission

45 L Street, N.E.

Washington, DC 20554

The Honorable Olivia Trusty

Commissioner

Federal Communications Commission

45 L Street, N.E.

Washington, DC 20554