

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on “Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission”

January 14, 2026

One of President Trump’s most defining qualities has been his contempt for American media and his hostility toward the First Amendment. Trump has repeatedly attacked and threatened late night hosts for making jokes that bruise his ego; dismissed reporting he does not like as “fake news;” smeared journalists for merely doing their jobs; taken completely meritless legal action against news networks that do not bend to his will; and debased the office he holds by resorting to bullying and name-calling, recently telling a veteran reporter who asked a question about the Epstein files, quote, “Quiet, Piggy.”

Our duty to conduct oversight of the FCC has never been more critical than it is today, because in Trump’s ongoing crusade to chill free speech, punish news networks, and vilify American journalism, there has been no greater ally than Chairman Brendan Carr.

Over the last year, Chairman Carr has grossly distorted the power and purpose of the FCC. He has weaponized the agency to benefit Trump and punish anyone who challenges him. He has rubber-stamped shady deals between media conglomerates when those deals have included monetary and political benefits for the President. He opened sham investigations into small, local media outlets for simply reporting on publicly available information about ICE raids. He weaponized the FCC’s public interest principles to bully news organizations. And he repeatedly violated the First Amendment by threatening and intimidating broadcasters who aired speech that the President does not like.

Don’t just take my word for it – there is a reason why Senator Ted Cruz said that Chairman Carr’s actions have been, and I quote, “right out of ‘Goodfellas’” and “dangerous as hell.”

This was never more apparent than when Chairman Carr threatened to revoke American broadcasters’ licenses if they did not take action against a comedy program – the Jimmy Kimmel Show – telling them, quote, “we can do this the easy way, or the hard way.” Let’s be very clear about what happened there: the federal government threatened to wield its power to stamp out speech it did not like. That is a violation of the First Amendment. That is censorship.

There was a time when my Republican colleagues would have been up in arms over it, when their allegiance to the First Amendment was greater than their loyalty to one man.

And Carr’s misdeeds do not end with his clear and dangerous violations of the First Amendment. After months of delay, Chairman Carr approved the Skydance-Paramount merger only after President Trump was paid \$16 million to settle a meritless lawsuit, offered \$20 million

in free advertising, and received guarantees that CBS's editorial decisions would be tweaked in his favor. This is what we call a quid pro quo, and it was facilitated by Chairman Carr. That's why Representative Raskin and I have opened an investigation into this merger's approval. The American people deserve to know the truth – and that some of us in Washington still believe that billionaires should have to play by the same rules as the rest of us.

In sum, Chairman Carr has abandoned the FCC's role as an independent agency and has instead turned it into an instrument for President Trump's own personal and political benefit. In fact, during his testimony before the Senate, he openly stated that the FCC is no longer an independent agency because the President says so. That is madness, and it makes clear the FCC is no longer operating in the public's interest. Quite the contrary, right now the FCC is failing the American people, and Chairman Carr is failing his oath to the Constitution. So, while today's hearing is a good start, it is past time that this Committee hold a media hearing so we can dig deeper into these and other matters.

Finally, Chairman Carr's decision to insert the FCC into policy debates where it has no authority to act while walking away from Congressional mandates and existing FCC rules is also very disturbing. While President Trump and Chairman Carr may wish that the FCC could preempt state and local laws on artificial intelligence, Congress has not given the agency that power. The FCC also does not have the power to raise the 39 percent national TV ownership cap, which can only be changed by Congress.

Americans deserve a lot better than this. They deserve an FCC that upholds their constitutional rights and acts in their interests, not the President's.

I yield back.