

*CNN News Central*

09/18/25

1:01:44 p.m.

2 minutes and 54 seconds

BORIS SANCHEZ: Today, President Donald Trump and his handpicked FCC chair are offering different reasons on why ABC decided to pull Jimmy Kimmel off the air indefinitely. First, here's President Trump speaking about Kimmel's ouster while overseas in England.

DONALD TRUMP: Jimmy Kimmel was fired because he had bad ratings more than anything else, and he said a horrible thing about a great gentleman known as Charlie Kirk. And Jimmy Kimmel is not a talented person. He had very bad ratings, and they should have fired him a long time ago. So you can call that free speech or not. He was fired for lack of talent.

SANCHEZ: We should point out Kimmel is suspended and he has not been fired, as the president said. But then there's FCC Chairman Brendan Carr, who recently threatened to "take action" against the network and its parent company, Disney, over Kimmel's comments regarding Republicans exploiting Charlie Kirk's killing. The chairman saying explicitly "we can do this the easy way or the hard way." Here's how Carr explained Kimmel's suspension.

BRENDAN CARR [on *The Benny Show*, 09/17/25]: The issue that arose here where lots and lots of people were upset was not a joke. It was not making fun or pillorying me or the administration or the president. It was appearing to directly mislead the American public about a significant fact of probably one of the most significant political events we have had in a long time. We are in the midst of a massive shift in dynamics in the media ecosystem for lots of reasons, again, including the permission structure that President Trump's election has provided. And I would simply say we're not done yet.

SANCHEZ: Let's zero in on what Kimmel actually said, the basis for his suspension. Here's the late-night comedian on Monday.

JIMMY KIMMEL [on ABC's *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, 09/15/25]: We hit some new lows over the weekend, with the MAGA gang desperately trying to characterize this kid who murdered Charlie Kirk as anything other than one of them and doing everything they can to score political points from it.

SANCHEZ: Kimmel appeared to be making a point about alleged finger pointing by the right-wing toward the left in the wake of Kirk's assassination. What he said did not appear to suggest that the suspect was a MAGA shooter. Also important to note, ABC did not take action until days after this aired. In fact, it came shortly after the FCC chair threatened to pull ABC's broadcast licenses. Also after the two largest station groups, Nexstar and Sinclair, said they would preempt Kimmel's show from their ABC stations. That's the same Nexstar that's currently trying to buy Tegna, another media company, a deal in which Nexstar would have to seek approval from the Trump administration. Specifically, they would need the FCC and Chairman Carr to loosen government restrictions on broadcast station ownership.

(....)

1:36:25 p.m.

4 minutes and 15 seconds

SANCHEZ: It wasn't that long ago, Larry, that a lot of the folks now happy with this suspension of Kimmel were advocating for free speech and an absolute version of free speech, including posts on social media, including the misinformation that Kim was accused of propagating. Do you think Republicans have shifted?

LARRY SABATO: They haven't shifted. They flip flopped. It's a complete flip flop. Not even a half flip flop. Because what they're really saying, and I've seen this before, and it truly has happened on the left as well as the right. The message is free speech for me and not for thee. You can have free speech as long as I agree with what you're saying. Well, that defeats the whole purpose of free speech. The First Amendment is there to protect speech you hate, not the speech you love. Everyone knows this, at least in this, at least in theory. But in practice, they don't want to hear things they hear things they disagree with.

BRIANNA KEILAR: So where does this — where do you see this going? What is the culmination of this?

SABATO: I hope it's not going where I fear it is where I see things potentially going when things get dark. And that is the authoritarian highway. You know, at first I thought maybe we were taking a step or two in that direction than it was a step a day and now, you know, we've got a high speed vehicle on the authoritarian highway. And I do believe the Trump administration is moving there because they've been so successful at. People have caved. They have bent the knee. Almost all of these institutions and supposedly powerful individuals have bent the knee, some because of riches and money and others because of political fear, as in Congress with the Republicans. They're sock puppets for Donald Trump. They do whatever he says. It's not that bad with the Supreme Court. But let's face it, six but out of the nine are conservative Republicans, three of them appointed by Trump. So, we'll see what happens in the 2026 elections. If Democrats can get a hold, say, of the House of Representatives, maybe you can have an institutional opposition. But right now, there's no opposition that really matters. It's not happening. It's not coalescing. And the Democrats have done an exceptionally poor job, even though I admit they don't have that institutional power that they'd like to have. But in terms of organization and communicating their message, you know, they — they get pretty low on the grade scale. I'd say, you know, D or F.

SANCHEZ: Is there any historical comparison in American history or — or parallel to this moment?

SABATO: Well, not precise. They're never precise parallels. Rarely are there precise parallels. But if you're going to cite a few examples and this is of executives seizing power, trying to expand executive power because they don't like criticism, you'd have to go back to the great and much admired and respected John Adams with the Alien and Sedition Act. That was certainly an

example and people actually went to jail for criticizing the criticizing the President of the United States. One of the professors that Thomas Jefferson hired when he founded the University of Virginia, was let go, in part because he had served six months in jail for having the temerity to criticize John Adams. That's incredible, isn't it? I'm sorry I even brought that up. I hope it hasn't given anybody any ideas in the administration. And, you know, during wars, you can — World War I, Wilson enjoyed a lot of the censorship. He was able also to strike out at old foes. And you had some of that in the civil war. Like, a lot of it in the civil war. You had some of it in World War II. And then of course, Nixon and Watergate, when the press truly was the enemy, Nixon would have liked to have said many of the things that Trump has said and gotten away with. But Nixon knew it away with. But Nixon knew it would only make it tougher on him. But for Trump, no problem at all.