

CNN's *The Situation Room*

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10 minute and 37 seconds

WOLF BLITZER: I want to get some more analysis right now. Here to discuss this, the former Fox News, the former ABC News host, former daytime talk show host Geraldo Rivera. Geraldo, thanks very much for joining us. You and I go way back.

GERALDO RIVERA,: My pleasure.

BLITZER: Did ABC make the right call and pulling Jimmy Kimmel off the air at least temporarily after the FCC chair told the companies “we could do this the easy way or the hard way”? That was a clear threat.

RIVERA: You know, by focusing on the censorship aspect and the First Amendment aspect, I think it's losing sight of what should be the lead. And that's that Jimmy Kimmel owes the family of Charlie Kirk and his wife, Erika, two small children, an apology. He — what's he saying, that if you're a member of MAGA and Charlie is a friend of MAGA, then he had it coming? It just — it's — in some ways, it's very, extremely, extremely insensitive. The country's in a very tough spot right now. Everyone's walking on egg shells. The First Amendment is not a license to incite hatred and I think that we can start the discussion. Once Jimmy Kimmel apologizes, then they can talk about the business aspects and whether or not he gets back on the schedule and so forth. But there's got to be a recognition that a terrible thing has happened here and that millions of Americans are grievously hurt by what happened. There is a — Charlie Kirk was beloved by many. And to just trample over it, he's not even buried yet, for goodness' sakes. And to make fun of the flags and half-staff and so forth, I just think that we have got to look at it with a notion that the country has to be healed, that we have to work to bring people together, that we need to respect each other. We don't have to agree, but we have to respect. And I think that the audience has deserted him for a good reason.

BLITZER: Let me play the full clip of what Jimmy Kimmel said and then we will assess that, because I want to make sure we have the full context of what you're suggesting, Geraldo. Listen to the this. We're trying to get that clip back, but I'm going to play it for our viewers, because I want to make sure we have the full context of what he actually said. I think we have it right now. Let's listen.

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. In between the finger-pointing, there was grieving. On Friday the White House flew the flags at half-staff, which got some criticism. But on a human level, you can see how hard the president is taking this.

QUESTION: My condolences on the loss of your friend Charlie Kirk. May I ask, sir, personally,

how are you holding up over the last day- and-a-half, sir?

DONALD TRUMP: I think very good and, by the way, right there, you see all the trucks. They just started construction of the new ballroom for the White House, which is something they have been trying to get, as you know, for about 150 years. And it's going to be a beauty.

[AUDIENCE LAUGHTER]

KIMMEL: Yes. He's at the fourth stage of grief, construction. Demolition, construction. This is not how an adult grieves the murder of someone he called a friend. This is how a 4-year-old mourns a goldfish, okay?

BLITZER: So, what jumped out at you, Geraldo? As I said, you and I have known each other for a long time. You're also a lawyer, so you understand the legal aspects of all of this. But what specifically jumped out at you?

RIVERA: He's basically saying that members of MAGA are — because Tyler Robinson is a member of MAGA, and, because of that, somehow, they had it coming, that Charlie Kirk had it coming, that once you go there, once embrace that philosophy, that ideology, you're fair game and it's just — I think that too often we — I my whole life, 55 years in the news business, the First Amendment has been my shield, my protection. I embrace it. I celebrate it. It's extremely important. And it is at times embattled. And I get that, but what we don't get, the more sophisticated it seems we are, what we don't get is how grievously hurt regular people are and how difficult sometimes in positions of power, in communications or government how easy it is to overlook the sincerity of that feeling and to dismiss it, and whether at an awards show or some other wonderful, lavish setting, so easy. But Charlie Kirk was a very simple guy. He was — I ran into him in the Hannity green room several times, always had a good frame of mind, a positive, optimistic person. He let you say whatever you were going to say. Then he tried his best to rebut it and to have a spirited, but meaningful debate. What I hear from Kimmel — and I don't want anybody fired. And once he apologizes, maybe this will be — have a different, have a happy ending, and I hope that that happens. But the First Amendment is not a license to incite hatred. And it doesn't matter that Kimmel's side — is — is more —

BLITZER: Let me just interrupt for a second, Geraldo. I want to get some context here, because Jimmy Kimmel, in that monologue, that late- night monologue, he was making a point about supposed right-wing finger-pointing at the left. He was not suggesting that Tyler Robinson, the 22-year-old suspect, was MAGA. He was not necessarily making that suggestion.

RIVERA: I guess we could see it different ways. I respect you totally, and I respect your opinion on that. I just — I have to tell you how I responded when I first heard it. I said, really, how dare he? How schmucky can he be? We haven't buried this person yet. His family is really, really hurt, and a lot of people who love them and now identify with them are also really hurt And the joke at the end about the goldfish, that should have been his whole bit without — keep Charlie Kirk out of it. Charlie Kirk did not deserve to get assassinated.

BLITZER: So let me just be precise —

RIVERA: — in the most —

BLITZER: Geraldo, let me just be precise. Do you agree with the ABC Disney decision to go ahead and suspend Jimmy Kimmel indefinitely?

RIVERA: I think that censorship sucks, Wolf, and I do not appreciate government producing shows. I think it's very dangerous. I don't — my beef is not with — well, I don't — they are irrelevant to the point I'm making. The point I'm making is about the American people, not people like the FCC commissioner or even Jimmy Kimmel. It's about the American people. The American people have suffered a trauma, a trauma that I think is minimized by smart people, sophisticated people who oppose Donald Trump. This is very simple. Have respect. You don't have to agree with me. Have affection. Have some feeling that we have lost somehow. We have allowed that — would — how would the left be responding if Charlie Kirk was one of them? I just think that it's time now to not only lower the temperature, but to embrace our fellow countryperson. It's a — I don't know — maybe — I think it's being dealt with at a business level, rather than a humanitarian level.

BLITZER: So how — are you worried, Geraldo, about free speech in our country right now?

RIVERA: We always worry about free speech. We have now for many, many years, since the 1960s. I started in 1970. We always worry about free speech. We fiercely guard it and we are very articulate and impassioned when we criticize government for it. And thank God we have the ability to do that. I think that those cynics who suggest that Jimmy Kimmel was doing badly in the ratings — not just the president, but a lot of commentators, even on CNN have said, have pointed out that Kimmel's ratings have flattened. But it should not matter whether his popularity affects his rights. The beef between him and his bosses, that's between them. Let them — they will fight it out. But I think that — I go back to where I started minutes ago, Wolf. Jimmy Kimmel owes the family of Charlie Kirk an apology. And it's wrong to overthink it and make it about government and censorship and these other issues. Deal with this first. Deal with the fact that America is in a tough spot. It's easy to be contemptuous of them. Better, though, to embrace a feeling of compassion. We're all in this together. Respect each other. Have respectful disagreements. But don't yell fire in a crowded theater.

BLITZER: Yes. All right, Geraldo Rivera, thank you very, very much. We will continue this conversation, to be sure, down the road.

RIVERA: Thank you, Wolf.

BLITZER: Geraldo Rivera joining us on this very sensitive, important issue.