

CNN News Central

09/22/25

3:36:58 p.m.

5 minutes and 51 seconds

BRIAN STELTER: Disney is bringing him back on the air tomorrow, ABC says in a statement that “we made the decision last week to suspend production to avoid further inflaming a tense situation at an emotional moment. But now, after having thoughtful conversations with Jimmy,” the ABC says, “we reached the decision to return the show on Tuesday.” But Kimmel is getting back to work.

BORIS SANCHEZ: Wow, Brian, that is significant, especially given that some of the players outside of Disney in a corporate setting like Nexstar and Sinclair, they essentially have deals that allowed them to preempt his show. And that’s part of the reason that it was suspended. Do we know how they might react to this?

STELTER: We don’t. And that becomes the big question now, will these local station affiliates choose to air *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, or will they continue to protest the comedian, even though the network is bringing him back nationwide? ABC does gently chastise Kimmel in this statement. The statement says — the decision to suspend him — “we made it because we felt some of the comments were ill timed and thus insensitive.” So they’re very gently saying they disagreed with Kimmel last week, but obviously they’re bringing him back as of tomorrow.

BRIANNA KEILAR: And we don’t know. Obviously, all of the considerations that went into this, Brian. But I would say leaders obviously at ABC and Disney have had the benefit of a few days of feedback.

STELTER: Yeah. Including from Disney employees who were very disturbed, including from Hollywood stars and showrunners, the kind of people Disney wants to work with and from free speech groups, politicians, even some Republican politicians like Ted Cruz. We know the condemnation of Disney has been widespread. Now, but we don’t know yet is what the counter reaction will be from president trump and his allies.

SANCHEZ: That’s a really good point, Brian. Please stand by. Terry, your reaction to this news.

TERRY MORAN: It’s great news. It’s great news. And I think you’re absolutely right. Brian is absolutely right. This was a community standing up for their for the rights of Jimmy Kimmel and all people who speak in public, entertainers and journalists and all of them. And it worked, at least with the with the head of Disney. And it makes good sense because they would have won in court. One thing that gets lost in this you do not lose your First Amendment rights because you have a broadcast license. Supreme Court has been clear on this. The government cannot take your license because of speech they don’t like.

KEILAR: You were talking about Katharine Graham who — when the news broke and these are the considerations of these bigger companies about how they’re going to handle this and how

they're going to think about it. They do have the benefit of some history, as they do consider these moves.

MORAN: Right? Well, Katharine Graham, when Nixon threatened to take her FCC, The Washington Post, FCC licenses, they had some local stations. It was a main source of income. She published them anyway. She said, forget about it. And that kind of corporate courage is rare, especially in the face of an administration that exceeds by many orders of magnitude, any other presidency trying to silence speech. It doesn't like.

SANCHEZ: If we still have. Brian, I want to go back to him because one of the interesting bits of reporting that we got over the last few days was that Kimmel was actually preparing a monologue that would up the ante against some of the feedback that he got from the trump administration. I mean, can you imagine, Brian, what might be formulating in terms of a response when he gets back on the air?

STELTER: Right. Kimmel wanted to defend himself. So now, Tuesday night's monologue becomes even more interesting. What he [says] will be critical, and it might affect what local stations decide to do going forward.

KEILAR: Yeah, certainly will. The I want to know what you think, Terry, about just sort of the moment that we are in when it comes to free speech. And I also want to play a moment from the White House press briefing today. This was a correspondent for Turning Point USA Frontline associated with the group that Charlie Kirk founded, who asked the White House press secretary what her message is to Americans who are too afraid to express their beliefs. Here's a brief part of what Karoline Leavitt said.

KAROLINE LEAVITT: We have a right to free speech in this country. The President supports it. It is protected by our beautiful Constitution, and Americans should not cower in fear. They should rise up in courage to continue speaking the truth.

KEILAR: What do you think about what you're hearing from the White House there, as we just get this news that Jimmy Kimmel will return to air tomorrow night?

MORAN: Right. Well, see what the White House says. Everybody should speak up except the ones that the President doesn't like. He just barked at my former colleague, Jonathan Karl. Maybe we'll come after you, because I don't like the content of your news coverage. All of this is bedrock First Amendment rights that we all have. And I think I think they've overreached here. Most Americans, even many, many who support President Trump, did not like the kind of gangster talk that the head of the FCC said, you can do this the easy way. You can do it the hard way. And they understand how precious this right is, even for people that they disagree strongly with. There's good common sense about our first amendment rights. And I think Trump is running up against that.

KEILAR: Yeah. Senator Ted Cruz said it was out of *Goodfellas*. To your point there, Terry, thank you so much for being with us. Really appreciate it. And this is the breaking news just in

from Disney. Jimmy Kimmel, his show will return to air tomorrow night. Big news there as a lot of conservatives who had been very pleased that his show was yanked off the air indefinitely initially were characterizing it as a firing. But his show will return tomorrow night.

(....)

3:49:27 p.m.

5 minutes and 54 seconds

SANCHEZ: And Elizabeth, it's still an open question whether some of the broadcast stations that initially threatened to preempt his show will be carrying it. Do we have any reaction so far from Nexstar and Sinclair?

ELIZABETH WAGMEISTER: We do not yet. This statement from the Walt Disney company coming in the last 30 minutes. So we do not know if they are going to carry the show tomorrow night, later in this week. But what we do know, based on Disney, is that they are airing the show regardless. So, even if Jimmy's show is being aired in less stations than it typically is, all of the country may not be able to see his show tomorrow night when he returns, but they are still committed to airing this show, so Disney now yes, condemning some of the statements that Jimmy made, yes, acknowledging that much of the country was perhaps offended by the statements that he made, but also really standing by Jimmy. And I do want to note that we have seen protests all throughout Hollywood, both in Los Angeles and in New York, at Disney's offices here in Hollywood, where *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* shoots his show. Today, there was a protest. So, the Hollywood community has very much been standing with Jimmy. They have wanted him to come back. And just a few hours ago, I reported on 400 celebrities, including everyone from Meryl Streep to Jennifer Aniston, who signed an open letter from the ACLU not attacking Disney in any way, not even addressing Disney or ABC, but attacking any censorship and any silencing from the government, saying that this is a moment that is bigger than our industry. Once you silence an entertainer, once you silence a journalist, then you silence everyone and it will be a snowball effect. So, you have to imagine that what went into Disney's decision was also, quite frankly, the creative partners that they have to work with. If you have the entire Hollywood community who is rallying behind Jimmy, well, that is something that they had to consider that his show was preempted from the air, which is this was never a cancellation. They always wanted to find a path forward. They just knew that they had to take the temperature down in a moment where they had very real threats from station groups and also very real threats from the President of the United States.

KEILAR: And Brian Stelter still with us here. It will be really interesting to see so much we don't know here, Brian, which is what is Jimmy Kimmel going to say tomorrow night? Who might his guests be? I mean, this is going to be illuminating about how he will handle his return.

STELTER: And how much he wants to make this bigger than just one show or just one comedian, right? Because certainly many in Hollywood believe this is a big, big test about free speech in the United States. That's much bigger than Kimmel's show. So whether he really wants to embrace that or not, that will be telling. Disney stock, by the way, popped as soon as this

headline crossed earlier this hour. Now, the stock's generally been down today, but you can see the chart perhaps on screen. A sudden spike upward when this news broke. That just speaks to how big this was becoming for Disney as a corporation. And it's telling that the statement about this, it did not come from Jimmy Kimmel's publicist at ABC. It came from Disney as a company. It came from Bob Iger's office. He's the CEO of Disney. He was feeling the pressure about this and certainly had to deal with this personally and directly.

SANCHEZ: Terry Moran is back with us. Terry, as an ABC veteran, I wonder what you make of — of this news, given the pressure that Bob Iger was under?

MORAN: He's under tremendous pressure. I know that he and Jimmy Kimmel are close, so they were discussing this cordially. And then I think he has a sense of where this story is going. That because the Hollywood community, which is obviously essential to Disney's business, was strongly against taking Kimmel off the air, and because that sense that the country doesn't want to pick off comedians one by one, there are people in MAGA who want to. The President wants to pick off anybody who he disagrees with or who is mean to him. But we're still Americans, and I think it's bad for business to go against that.

KEILAR: What are you looking for tomorrow night in what is such a critical moment when it comes to free speech and how the President approaches that? You've written a lot about that. What are you looking for?

MORAN: Well, first of all, look for how many stations are taking the Kimmel show. That will show if the battle is still going or if, in fact, this is a step beyond that moment. And then I'll also look for what he says. That's what we're all going to look for. How — how tough is he on what happened to him? How open is he to reaching out to the people who found what he said divisive or hurtful? It's going to be in a moment.

SANCHEZ: Yeah. No question. A huge moment in American history. It's notable, given the uncertainty surrounding where this was all headed. It wasn't clear. And now it seems like Jimmy Kimmel again. The breaking news is going to return to the air tomorrow night. ABC putting out a statement that they have decided after thoughtful conversations, to return the show on Tuesday.

KEILAR: Yeah, that's exactly right. And they do obviously have some issues with what he said, that they had suspended him initially indefinitely characterized by some of those who were very gleeful at Jimmy Kimmel's suspension as a firing. But it is not in this case.