

CNN's *The Arena*

09/22/25

4:02:20 p.m.

1 minutes and 3 seconds

ELIZABETH WAGMEISTER: And I have to tell you that based on what I have been hearing from my sources and based on what we know about Jimmy Kimmel, we should not expect Jimmy Kimmel to tone down his comments here. That is not something that he is interested in doing. That is not his brand. As a comedian, if you have watched his show, you know exactly his thoughts on the state of the country. And remember, I have sources who told me last week on Wednesday that part of the reason why Disney decided to take a beat and say, let's preempt the show tonight is because they felt that Jimmy Kimmel's monologue was too hot. That is the word that a source told me. I was told that his monologue last Wednesday was going to take aim at MAGA, was going to take aim at Fox News, and on Wednesday, at least of last week, Jimmy Kimmel did not want to tone that down. And you have to keep in mind that many of his fans who agree with him don't want him to tone that down as well. So it will be very interesting to see what he has to say when he returns to air tomorrow.

(...)

4:10:23 p.m.

57 seconds

LISA RESPERS FRANCE: This is really — had turned, has turned into a conversation about the First Amendment right. And you've even heard from people on the right saying, this is not cool. Like, we don't want to get into a situation where there is even the perception that the government can shut someone down for what many people have been saying is just, in essence, a joke that Jimmy Kimmel. Yes, he was making comments about Charlie Kirk and about Charlie Kirk death, his murder, but that — that was a lead in into a joke. And so you saw a lot of people, you know, come forward and say, people on the right and on the left saying, are we getting to the point where if the president of the United States doesn't like something that you say, that you can just be shut down automatically? So because *The View* has run afoul of the administration before with some of the things that they've said, they were like some of the main people that folks were expecting to hear from when it came to this whole situation with Jimmy Kimmel and his show being pulled off the air.

(...)

4:14:55 p.m.

47 seconds

WAGMEISTER: [T]hat is going to anger the President. That is going to anger many on the right. But Disney had a decision to make, and ultimately the decision was we are going to make someone unhappy with whatever we do. If you don't bring him back, then you have the entire Hollywood community that you have to work with being upset. You have the left upset. As Lisa

France said, this has become so much bigger than Jimmy Kimmel. This is a conversation about free speech. This is a conversation about government interfering in entertainment and in free speech. So you either were going to have one side upset that he didn't come back, or you're going to have another side upset that he is back. So it's a lose lose situation. But this is ultimately what the resolution is.

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4:17:14 p.m.

51 seconds

FRANCE: I think what we're seeing here, it almost feels like The Avengers. It feels like Hollywood came together with the left and Jimmy Kimmel's audience, and they really kind of formed in what felt unstoppable. You know, I was talking to a friend as soon as the news broke who said, oh, we had to have known this was going to happen, with everybody saying that they were going to cancel. And also with these major celebrities like Meryl Streep and Tom Hanks and Jennifer Aniston coming out to complain. So, it feels like we've gotten this, this whole thing in front of what people like to refer to as the normies, the people who are not chronically online, who are now having the conversation about where this country is headed. And because of Jimmy Kimmel and because of him being pulled off air. So who would have ever thought that late night TV would be as powerful as it is in terms of having conversations about democracy, Pam? But that's exactly where we are right now.

PAMELA BROWN: It certainly is.

(....)

4:19:06 p.m.

1 minute and 32 seconds

DAVID CHALIAN: First and foremost, this is a business story and how Disney came to the conclusion to turn around and, whether or not that was due to political pressure or whether or not it was a purely sort of like financial decision they saw, I think the reporting will bear that out. Here's what is important to note. When Jimmy Kimmel was pulled off the air for people on the left, it was like — it was a real watershed moment. There was a real it felt like there were all these data points — when I was talking to sources on the left — that had been building throughout trump's term in this space, in the freedom of speech space, in the democracy, space, and that for some reason, this shook Democrats to the core as a — as a galvanizing moment. And I think you see that that was received by the company clearly. And what we're seeing here on the right, I think that you, you know, you saw what Brendan Carr was trying to accomplish, you saw backfire with his own party, right? Ted Cruz coming out and saying he should have no involvement in this. You know, nobody was out there on the right defending Jimmy Kimmel or saying his comments were totally appropriate, but they were saying, this is not a place for government to get involved. And so Donald Trump's coalition was starting to split on this, and the Democrats were wholly unified in real concern. So, it left sort of Disney on an odd island that

I think they're trying to course correct now.

(....)

4:26:31 p.m.

2 minutes

LULU GARCIA NAVARRO: This is, I think, the death knell for mass media. I think what this shows is that you cannot anymore try and service a wide audience. Our country is simply too divided and people are going to different places to consume different media. And so, Jimmy Kimmel, and the people that like Jimmy Kimmel and watched Jimmy Kimmel, we know that they're majority Democrats. There might be some Republicans there, there might be some independents, but a lot of them are Democrats. And so, they're going to be mad if you take Jimmy Kimmel off the air. Taking Jimmy Kimmel off the air isn't going to get you Republicans. They're not going to come over and suddenly say, hey, we're going to watch Jimmy Kimmel. And so I think there's a bigger conversation to be had at this moment about what we think about when we think about mass media.

BROWN: What do you think?

PETER MEIJER: No, I mean, I'm really trying to plumb the depths of my profound indifference for Jimmy Kimmel's career here. But to your point on the echo chambers, that's very real. And this was what got Jimmy Kimmel in this problem in the first place. He was reiterating a lie, and it is a lie that the assassin of Charlie Kirk was motivated by right of center beliefs. One in three Democrats believe that.

CHALIAN: I don't know if that's actually what he was saying.

BROWN: No.

CHALIAN: I don't think that's what he was saying.

MEIJER: He was saying —

BROWN: He said — but that's not what he was saying, that they were trying to score political points.

MEIJER: But by saying it was anyone other than what it was. And again, if that was occurring in a vacuum, if you didn't have Democratic elected officials repeating that same lie, if you didn't have one in three Democrats believing that same lie, I do not think this would have that salience. And that is the problem with the echo chambers is all of a sudden you find anything to blame? Everybody outside of your network, right? I do not remember the last time on any of the broadcast cable or — excuse me — broadcast late night shows, there was a Republican elected representative. They go on Bill Maher. But for the Democratic elected officials, it's a right of passage. That's why they're wearing the baseball cap.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: But maybe they're not getting — I mean, they might be invited, but they don't come. I mean, there's something to be said for that, too as someone who runs a podcast —

MEIJER: No, but they don't.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: — you know, you can you can —

MEIJER: I would go!

GARCIA-NAVARRO: — extend invitations and sometimes, you know, they want to service their base.

(...)

4:29:26 p.m.
24 seconds

BROWN: So just on the larger issue of free speech, are you comfortable with how this played out?

MEIJER: No, I don't like jawboning. I don't like that the FCC has these powers. Now, my problem is I would love to see a Democrat stand up and say, yes, the government shouldn't have these powers. Let's defang the FCC. Let's do something about these broadcast monopolies. But instead it's okay. We hate this when the other side is doing it, but we're taking notes and we're back in charge. We'll be able to use those same levers.

(...)

4:30:23 p.m.
1 minute and 15 seconds

ASHLEY ALLISON: I think there's also an assumption of his viewership. I agree that, like, we might the mass media might be over, perhaps, I don't know — but there's a lot of people that are just laying in bed watching Jimmy Kimmel, whether they're really paying attention to it or not. And some of them are Republicans and some of them are Democrats, and they may be watching and disagreeing with everything he says. But that is something that actually is a part of this adrenaline, dopamine hit is that, in mass media right now, is why we swipe so much is like, you actually need a charge of something. But last week when this happened, all of my Republican friends on this network told me this was a business decision. This happened because Sinclair affiliates were saying that their folks did not want to watch Jimmy Kimmel. Well, I was reading reports this weekend that Disney lost \$4 billion, whether it was in shares, whether it was because there was an effort by folks on the left to get people to cancel their subscription. And I would argue perhaps Disney also saw that as a business decision and that they might have went — the pendulum may have swung too far. Voters get — presidents should not determine what people are saying and what people are not saying, but voters get determine how they spend their dollars,

how they select their subscriptions and what they watch. And I think that this was a win for the left. And the voters spoke.