

Re: Letter opposing the Paramount-WBD proposed merger because it will undermine press freedom and editorial independence

We are current and former journalists, documentary filmmakers, professors and advocates who oppose the proposed merger between Paramount-Skydance and Warner Bros. Discovery. The merger would open the door to improper political meddling in journalists' editorial decisions.

The First Amendment recognizes that a free and independent press is the lifeblood of democracy. Without it, citizens cannot make informed decisions, governments cannot be held to account, and the truth is replaced by whatever alternative facts those in power put forward.

This is not a partisan issue — officials from both political parties in the U.S., and virtually all governments worldwide throughout history, have been eager to silence their critics whenever possible. Fortunately, our Constitution restrains them from doing so.

But if the merger proceeds, the government will accomplish through regulatory approval processes what the First Amendment bars it from doing directly. The Wall Street Journal reported that Paramount CEO David Ellison promised President Donald Trump “sweeping changes” at Warner-owned CNN – a frequent target of Trump’s ire – if the merger is approved.

Ellison has already made such sweeping changes to appease Trump at Paramount’s current major news holding, CBS News. To gain the administration’s approval to acquire Paramount and its subsidiary, CBS, Ellison’s Skydance agreed to appoint a “bias ombudsman.” It eventually hired a career partisan without journalistic experience, Kenneth Weinstein, for the role.

It also made vague commitments to “fact-based” and “unbiased” reporting, opening the door to further meddling by the government, which should never serve as the arbiter of facts and bias.

Paramount has since hired Trump-aligned columnist Bari Weiss as editor-in-chief of CBS News. News segments critical of Trump policies have been pulled; revered producers and reporters have quit rather than be censored; shows Trump dislikes, like *The Late Show With Stephen Colbert*, have been cancelled; and CBS Evening News has taken to airing flattering features on Trump officials, like one calling Secretary of State Marco Rubio the “ultimate Florida man.”

Further, Paramount reportedly invited Trump’s FCC Chair, Brendan Carr, to be its guest at the White House Correspondents Association dinner. CBS invited Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. Carr and Hegseth are among the Trump administration’s most egregious press freedom violators. Ellison also hosted a dinner in advance of the WHCA to honor Trump himself.

With this track record, Ellison will likely alter CNN’s editorial direction (not to mention meddle with HBO’s documentaries) to be more friendly to the administration, threatening press freedom. Officials seem to expect exactly that. Hegseth said, “The sooner David Ellison takes over [CNN], the better.” Carr cited the merger as an example of Trump “winning” his war on the media.

We urge federal and state regulators and lawmakers, as well as Paramount shareholders and news consumers, to treat this merger not as an arms-length and above board business transaction, but as what it plainly is: a political arrangement to circumvent constitutional safeguards, with severe consequences for American democracy.

Signed,

**JOURNALISTS, FORMER JOURNALISTS
AND DOCUMENTARIANS**

Jim Acosta

Mary Alfieri

Mara Altschuler

Randy Atkins

Jane Aylor

Don Bayley

Mary Bell

Austin Belzer

Stevie Berberick

Eliot Brenner

David Brown

Brian J. Buchanan

Jeremy Busby

Silvio Carrillo

John Michael Castagna

Thomasina Nista Chaffardet

Jack Cloherty

David Cohen

Lisa R. Cohen

John Collins

Paul Colten

Jim Connor

Loretta R. Cooper

James Croxton

SE Cupp

Chris Dahl

Ted David

Walter Dean

Jim DeRogatis

Greg Dobbs

Sam Donaldson

Bob Dotson

Dale Eisman

Patricia W. Elliott

Joan Erle

Chris Faraone

Martha Feingold

Laura Flanders

Tom Flynn

Jeffrey Fox

Elissa Free

Bonnie Fuller

Jean Garner

Tom Gauger

Dana Garrett

Amanda B. Gillooly

Paul A. Gluck

Amy Goldberg

Bob Goldsborough

Bill Green

Mike Gudgell

Paul H. Hanson

Da'Shaun L. Harrison

Mehdi Hasan

Alicia Hastey

Marilyn Heck

Mike Hegedus

Bob Hoenig

Peggy Magner Holter

Dean Hovell

Dick Hubert

Paul R. Huard

Sheila S. Hula

Bob Hurley

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Michael W. Kahn

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Andrea Koppel

Brad Kornfeld

Mark Kramer
Frank Kracher
Anita Krichmar
Jeannie Kung
Amy La Porte
Jonathan Larsen
Margaret Larson
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Media Alliance
The Media and Democracy Project
National Press Photographers Association
Project Censored
Women Press Freedom

ORGANIZATIONS

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AMEJA (Arab and Middle Eastern
Journalists Association)
American Society of Journalists and Authors
Chicago Public Square
Coalition For Women In Journalism (CFWIJ)
Common Cause
Demand Progress
Fourth Branch Action
Free Press
Freedom of the Press Foundation
International Documentary Association
JoinJeremy
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