

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

July 29, 2025

VIA EMAIL

The Honorable Brendan Carr
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street, NE
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Carr:

On July 24, 2025, the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) announced that it had approved Paramount Global’s (“Paramount”) merger with Skydance Media, LLC (“Skydance”), three weeks after Paramount announced it would settle a frivolous lawsuit brought by President Donald Trump.¹ The timing of the FCC’s evaluation and approval of the merger suggests that the agency’s actions were conditioned on payments to the President. The appearance of such a corrupt quid pro quo reeks of a thinly disguised bribe. Moreover, the terms of the FCC’s merger approval once again demonstrate that the FCC is engaged in an unprecedented and illegal campaign to chill free speech and independent news reporting protected by the First Amendment. Accordingly, I write to demand that you provide the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (“the Subcommittee”) with detailed information about the FCC’s negotiations regarding and approval of the Paramount merger and that you produce related records.

President Trump’s lawsuit against CBS News was a baseless attack on the free press, meant to intimidate a storied American news broadcaster—an extortion effort for which the FCC has eagerly weaponized merger and licensing proceedings.² On October 31, 2024, President Trump sued CBS News in a Texas federal court, claiming that its airing of segments of a *60 Minutes* interview with then-Vice President Kamala Harris intentionally deceived voters to provide the Vice President an electoral advantage.³ After assuming office, President Trump

¹ Press Release, FCC Approves Skydance's Acquisition of Paramount CBS, Fed. Communications Commission (Jul. 24, 2025), <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-413229A1.pdf>.

² “From Walter Cronkite’s reporting on the Vietnam War to publishing the first photos of the abuses by American soldiers at Abu Ghraib, CBS News has a proud history of public service when it comes to checking government wrongdoing.” Katie Fallow, *Paramount’s Trump Lawsuit Settlement: Curtain Call for the First Amendment?* (Guest Column), VARIETY (Jul. 3, 2025), <https://variety.com/2025/biz/opinion/paramount-trump-lawsuit-settlement-first-amendment-column-1236446790/>.

³ See Complaint, Trump v. CBS Broadcasting Inc., No. 24-cv-00236 (N.D. Tex. Oct. 31, 2024), ECF No. 1, <https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.txnd.396451/gov.uscourts.txnd.396451.1.0.pdf>.

doubled the amount he demanded from CBS News, seeking \$20 billion.⁴ Simultaneously, in an egregious abuse of regulatory authority, the FCC announced that it was investigating CBS News' editing of the *60 Minutes* interview for alleged news distortion.⁵ *60 Minutes* and its journalists have forcefully maintained that the allegations of deceptive editing are without merit,⁶ and the President's case has been "labeled as frivolous by 1st Amendment experts."⁷

Despite the frivolous nature of the President's lawsuit, facing deadlines and delayed FCC consideration, Paramount chose to pay President Trump a \$16 million settlement and released transcripts of Vice President Harris's *60 Minutes* interviews to the FCC.⁸ Additionally, President Trump claims that "CBS will provide him with \$20m worth of advertising and programming" following Paramount's merger with Skydance.⁹ Beyond the news division, CBS announced that it would cancel *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, silencing a vocal critic of the President—who called Paramount's settlement with Trump a "big fat bribe."¹⁰

After prolonging official proceedings until the President's lawsuit was settled, the FCC finally approved the Paramount-Skydance merger, adding its own unconstitutional conditions that seek to police the speech of CBS. According to Skydance's written filing in the docket, 'New Paramount' will maintain an ombudsman to evaluate claims of bias over programs such as *60 Minutes*.¹¹ Your press release on the approval sheds light on the true motivation for the settlement—government censorship—promising "significant changes at the once storied CBS broadcast network" that will require changes in the viewpoints and ideologies expressed in programming.¹² As the FCC's approval notes, New Paramount continues to face a proceeding for 'news distortion' that you had reopened—ensuring that the Commission has ample leverage if it,

⁴ Amended Complaint, *Trump v. CBS Broadcasting Inc.*, No. 24-cv-00236 (N.D. Tex. Feb. 7, 2025), ECF No. 36, https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.txnd.396451/gov.uscourts.txnd.396451.36.0_3.pdf.

⁵ *RCFP: FCC must drop CBS 'news distortion' inquiry*, REPORTERS COMMITTEE FOR FREEDOM OF THE PRESS (Mar. 7, 2025), <https://www.rcfp.org/fcc-comments-cbs-news-distortion/>.

⁶ Statement from 60 Minutes, CBS News (Oct. 20, 2024), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/60-minutes-statement/>. Moreover, "Mr. Trump pulled out of his interview with 60 Minutes and the vice president participated." *Id.*

⁷ Stephen Battaglio, *Inside CBS News: Fear, anger and a silver lining after Paramount-Trump settlement*, L.A. TIMES (July 3, 2025), <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/business/story/2025-07-03/cbs-news-tries-to-move-forward-after-trump-lawsuit-settlement>.

⁸ Benjamin Mullin, Michael M. Grynbaum, Lauren Hirsch, & David Enrich, *Paramount to Pay Trump \$16 Million to Settle '60 Minutes' Lawsuit*, N.Y. TIMES (July 2, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/02/business/media/paramount-trump-60-minutes-lawsuit.html>; David Shepardson, *CBS turns over documents in FCC probe of then VP Harris' '60 Minutes' interview*, REUTERS (Feb. 4, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/cbs-turns-over-documents-fcc-probe-into-then-vp-harris-60-minutes-interview-2025-02-04/>.

⁹ Callum Jones, *Trump claims new CBS owner will gift him \$20m worth of airtime after \$16m settlement*, THE GUARDIAN (Jul. 22, 2025), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jul/22/trump-cbs-settlement-stephen-colbert>.

¹⁰ Yurii Stasiuk & Nicole Markus, *CBS cancels Stephen Colbert's show days after Trump settlement criticism*, POLITICO (Jul. 18, 2025), <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/07/18/cbs-cancels-stephen-colbert-00462089>.

¹¹ SK Viewpoint Diversity Letter to FCC, *In the Matter of Skydance Media and Paramount Global*, MB Docket No. 24-275, (filed Jul. 22, 2025), www.fcc.gov/ecfs/document/1072299913934/2.

¹² Press Release, *supra* note 1.

or the President, dislikes CBS's programming or reporting decisions.¹³ Disturbingly, the FCC's coercion of Paramount and Skydance is only part of the Administration's ongoing, unlawful campaign to silence prominent criticism of the President. Indeed, on July 24, 2025, you said of another television talk show that has criticized the President, "Once President Trump has exposed these media gatekeepers and smashed this facade, there's a lot of consequences. I think the consequences of it aren't quite finished."¹⁴

The Subcommittee has launched a preliminary inquiry into the Administration's attacks on the First Amendment and is reviewing how the President and the FCC's actions and Paramount's settlement erode and undermine freedom of speech and freedom of the press and bear on the laws governing mergers and acquisitions of media companies.¹⁵ Accordingly, by August 12, 2025, please provide detailed responses to the following questions. Moreover, please produce all records referring or related to Paramount's settlement of President Trump's lawsuit.

1. What are the complete terms of Paramount's commitments with the FCC? Provide any records documenting the negotiations and conditions during discussions and approval of the merger, including internal FCC records describing the Commission's deliberations and communications with Skydance and Paramount.
2. Explain in detail the extent to which you or any agent of the FCC discussed the lawsuit filed against Paramount by President Trump and its settlement with President Trump or any Administration official, or any agent thereof.
3. Explain in detail the extent to which you or any agent of FCC discussed the lawsuit filed against Paramount by President Trump and its settlement with Paramount or Skydance, or any agent thereof.
4. Describe in detail all discussions, negotiations, proposals, and agreements with Paramount and Skydance regarding editorial control, changes to content and programming (including changes in editorial staff or structure), and review of political viewpoints of Paramount's stations and content.
5. Describe in detail how the FCC will evaluate whether Paramount has followed its settlement obligations to "root out the bias" and "embod[y] a diversity of viewpoints across the political and ideological spectrum."¹⁶

¹³ Memorandum Opinion and Order, *In the Matter of Skydance Media and Paramount Global*, MB Docket No. 24-275, (filed Jul. 22, 2025), n.147, <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-25-43A1.pdf>.

¹⁴ Gene Maddaus, *FCC Chairman Brendan Carr 'Pleased' With Skydance Commitment to Reform CBS*, VARIETY (Jul. 24, 2025), <https://variety.com/2025/tv/news/fcc-brendan-carr-skydance-reform-cbs-1236469119/>.

¹⁵ Letter from The Hon. Richard Blumenthal, Ranking Member, Permanent Subcomm. on Investigations to Mr. Patrick Webre, Acting Bureau Chief, Enforcement Bureau & Ms. Erin Boone, Acting Bureau Chief, Media Bureau, Fed. Comm. Commission (Mar. 12, 2025), <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025-3-12-Letter-from-Sen.-Richard-Blumenthal-to-Patrick-Webre-and-Erin-Boone.pdf>.

¹⁶ Press Release, *supra* note 1.

6. Produce all communications regarding the reopening of the WCBS-TV complaint closed on January 16, 2025, including, but not limited to, any deliberations or decisions that took place regarding its possible reopening.¹⁷

Please contact the Subcommittee should you have any questions about responding to these requests. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations

cc: The Honorable Ron Johnson
Chairman
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations

¹⁷ *News Distortion Complaint Involving CBS Broadcasting Inc., licensee of WCBS, New York, NY*, Order (EB Jan. 22, 2025), <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-25-85A1.pdf>.