

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 1, 2026

The Honorable Brendan Carr
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street NE
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Carr:

This letter is regarding the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) recent guidance reinterpreting the equal time rule and its implications for free expression and independent journalism.

This reinterpretation represents a significant departure from nearly a century of statutory history and decades of bipartisan FCC precedent designed to protect editorial judgment and prevent government interference in speech. This action appears to be part of a broader pattern of public statements and regulatory actions by you that distort the power and purpose of the FCC and raises further concerns about the Trump Administration's use of its authority to influence lawful speech.

As you know, the equal time rule originates from Section 18 of the Radio Act of 1927 and requires broadcasters to provide equal opportunities to legally qualified candidates who request airtime. Recognizing that a rigid application of this requirement would undermine effective election coverage, Congress established multiple exemptions in 1959 to preserve the ability of broadcasters to report on newsworthy events and candidates. Among these, the bona fide news interview exemption has long been understood to protect editorial discretion in news and talk programming. The FCC itself reaffirmed in 2006 that the interview portion of late-night programs fall within the bona fide news interview exemption.

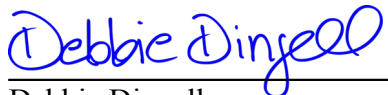
The FCC's recent guidance appears to abandon this longstanding practice. By signaling that a candidate's broadcast appearance could trigger new political filing obligations and equal time demands, the guidance introduces regulatory uncertainty that could predictably discourage broadcasters from airing lawful, newsworthy content, thereby chilling free speech. When broadcasters alter programming decisions, avoid discussions, or decline interviews out of fear of regulatory scrutiny, the public is deprived of information and perspectives that are essential to our democracy. This outcome is not inconsequential, and thus it is deeply troubling that you would rather use your authority as Chairman of the FCC to suppress speech instead of protecting it.

The FCC was never intended to function as an arbiter of political content or as a mechanism for influencing editorial decisions. Efforts that leverage the value of broadcast licenses to shape or constrain lawful expression undermine First Amendment protections, erode public trust in independent institutions, and threaten democracy.

We urge the FCC to restore clarity and confidence by reversing its guidance and reaffirming that it will not use its authority to intimidate broadcasters or suppress lawful expression. Our democracy depends on a free press that can exercise independent judgment without fear of retaliation from the government.

As the Members of the committee of jurisdiction over the FCC, we appreciate your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



Doris Matsui
Member of Congress