

Trump's FCC chair investigates NPR and PBS, urges Congress to defund them

Federal Communications Commission Chairman Brendan Carr has ordered an investigation into NPR and PBS in a move that Democrats described as an attempt to intimidate the media.

"I am writing to inform you that I have asked the FCC's Enforcement Bureau to open an investigation regarding the airing of NPR and PBS programming across your broadcast member stations," Carr wrote in a letter yesterday to the leaders of NPR and PBS.

Carr alleged that NPR and PBS are violating a federal law prohibiting noncommercial educational broadcast stations from running commercial advertisements. "I am concerned that NPR and PBS broadcasts could be violating federal law by airing commercials," Carr wrote. "In particular, it is possible that NPR and PBS member stations are broadcasting underwriting announcements that cross the line into prohibited commercial advertisements."

Carr's letter did not provide any specific examples of underwriting announcements that might violate the law, but said the "announcements should not promote the contributor's products, services, or businesses, and they may not contain comparative or qualitative descriptions, price information, calls to action, or inducements to buy, sell, rent, or lease."

Carr: Defund NPR and PBS

Carr pointed out that NPR and PBS member broadcast stations are licensed by the FCC. He also stated his opposition to government funding for NPR and PBS, though he acknowledged that isn't up to the FCC. Carr wrote:

For your awareness, I will be providing a copy of this letter to relevant Members of Congress because I believe this FCC investigation may prove relevant to an ongoing legislative debate. In particular, Congress is actively considering whether to stop requiring taxpayers to subsidize NPR and PBS programming. For my own part, I do not see a reason why Congress should continue sending taxpayer dollars to NPR and PBS given the changes in the media marketplace since the passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967.

To the extent that these taxpayer dollars are being used to support a for-profit endeavor or an entity that is airing commercial advertisements, then that would further undermine any case for continuing to fund NPR and PBS with taxpayer dollars.

The FCC's Democratic commissioners, Anna Gomez and Geoffrey Starks, issued statements denouncing the investigation. "This appears to be yet another Administration effort to weaponize the power of the FCC. The FCC has no business intimidating and silencing broadcast media," Gomez said.

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