Why March 26 Was a Big Day for Public Media

Public media found itself in the public spotlight on March 26. As the leaders of NPR and PBS appeared before a Congressional committee, the head of the Voice of America filed a lawsuit over President **Donald Trump**‘s attempts to silence the federally-funded news organization.

Both events spotlight the Trump administration’s oft-stated antipathy towards public media and underline the existential threats facing all three outlets in the next four years.

VOA director **Michael Abramowitz** posted a statement on LinkedIn explaining his choice to sue the administration over a March 14 executive order that essentially dismantled its domestic and international operations. “I did so after reluctantly concluding that litigation is the only way to stop the wholesale destruction of VOA, an 83-year-old institution chartered by Congress,” wrote Abramowtiz, who filed the suit in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C.

The new lawsuit comes on the heels of a separate suit previously filed in the Southern District of New York by six VOA employees on March 22. Abramowitz noted that this new filing “complements” the other case by representing all of the outlet’s journalists and stakeholders.

“I am grateful to our colleagues who have joined me in this critically important effort,” he added. “I am speaking for those who cannot be named for fear of retribution from the authoritarian regimes they fled. I know we all stand with them in the firm belief in democracy and all that is enshrined in the U.S. Constitution.”

Over 1,000 VOA employees learned they would be out of work the day after Trump issued his executive order—a day that's already become known as "Bloody Saturday." In his statement, Abramowitz was unable to provide any timeline for if and when their jobs might be restored, but stressed that he was "working non-stop" to make the case for safeguarding the VOA's future.

"Voice of America has always maintained strong bipartisan support," he noted. "Closing down Voice of America would be an incalculable self-inflicted wound for America and deprive the U.S. of a priceless asset."

Meanwhile, **Paula Kerger** and **Katherine Maher**—the CEOs of PBS and NPR, respectively—testified in a Congressional hearing organized by Rep. **Marjorie Taylor Greene**. Along with her fellow Republicans, the Georgia representative lacerated both outlets for coverage she claimed showed signs of bias.

"NPR and PBS have increasingly become radical, left-wing echo chambers for a narrow audience," Greene said in her opening remarks, going on to call for an end to their federal funding. "For far too long, federal taxpayers have been forced to fund biased news. This needs to come to an end, and now."

The Congressional Democrats on the committee defended both outlets, as did both executives. "There's nothing more American than PBS," Kerger emphasized, while Maher noted that NPR's journalism was rooted in "unbiased, nonpartisan, fact-based reporting."

Those entreaties appear to be falling on deaf ears within the Trump administration and the Republican majority in Congress. The day prior to the hearing, the president called both NPR and PBS biased, and indicated that he was open and eager to slash their funding.

But a Pew Research Center poll released on Monday showed that

a larger share of Americans still support public media than oppose. 43% of all respondents said that PBS and NPR should continue to receive federal funding, while only 24% opposed and 33% were undecided.

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