



The Public Interest in Free Speech: A Conversation with FCC Commissioner Gomez
California State University, Los Angeles
May 28, 2025

This event featured a panel discussion with **the Honorable Anna M. Gomez**, commissioner, Federal Communications Commission; **U.S. Representative Raul Ruiz, M.D.**; **Dr. Safiya U. Noble**, MacArthur Fellowship recipient and UCLA professor; **Alejandra Santamaria**, president and CEO, Southern California Public Radio; and **Gabriel Lerner**, editor emeritus of *La Opinión*. **Jessica J. González**, co-CEO, Free Press, served as the event's moderator. At the end of the panel, panelists took questions from audience members.

The second portion of the event was a public listening session.

This Free Press forum can be viewed in its entirety [here](#).

Part 1: Panel Discussion

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Good afternoon. Hello. Oh, yeah. I like it. I like it. It's a vocal group. Good afternoon. Welcome to Los Angeles, Commissioner Gomez. I'm Jessica González, the co-CEO of Free Press, and I want to welcome you all here today. We have a bustling room here in Los Angeles, and we also have hundreds of people joining us via livestream. So, that's why I'm talking into the mic even though I'm very loud and you could all hear me in this room easily. So, listen. I'm here.

I'm the co-CEO of Free Press. Free Press is an organization dedicated to ensuring that the people have a voice in the decisions that shape our media system. And that's why we're here today with FCC Commissioner Gomez because she wants to hear from you. We are facing a crisis. The threats to free speech are extremely chilling and we're here to talk about that today. We're here to hear from the public, but also an esteemed panel of experts. The FCC is meant to protect consumers and ensure that there is free speech in this country. Instead, it's investigating newsrooms. It's going after companies that are practicing diversity, equity and inclusion. And it's going after media outlets that air opposing viewpoints. This seems to be a clear effort to quash dissent.

So, I want to welcome everyone who's here, but I also want to have some curiosity in the room about who's not here. Because to get ready for this event, I talked to dozens and dozens of people, including public safety officials, including journalists, including people in the entertainment industry who express



deep concern about what's going on in the country and deep fear about speaking out about that for fear of government retribution for airing their opinions. And so I want to call that into the room.

There's a lot of brave people who are here to speak up today for free speech, but there's a lot of people who are doing important reporting, who are supporting communities, providing services, people keep keeping people safe during emergencies who aren't here because of the chilling effect of the administration's attacks on free expression. So, just a little agenda. We are going to have a panel for the next 40 minutes or so. We're going to have some time for Q&A. We do have some news media in the audience with us. Actually, quite a bit of news media in the audience. And then we're going to excuse the panelists at about 1:30 and we're going to invite you all up to some mics for a community listening session where you can share your perspective with the Commissioner. And then we'll hear closing remarks from the Commissioner and Congressman Raul Ruiz, who is driving in from the desert right now and will join us in progress.

So with that, I want to introduce our speakers. We have the Honorable Anna Gomez, FCC Commissioner. We have Dr. Safia Noble of UCLA, MacArthur Genius and author of *Algorithms of Oppression*. We have Gabriel Lerner, the founder of *Hispanic L.A.* and editor emeritus of *La Opinión*, the nation's largest Spanish-language daily newspaper. And we have Alejandra "Alex" Santamaria from LAist. That's the SoCal Public Radio Group. She's the CEO there. So, thank you all for joining us. Oh, yeah. So, I want to start with you, Commissioner, because this is your first stop outside the Beltway on your First Amendment Tour to challenge government censorship and control. I'm super curious. You're an insider. You have an inside view of the FCC and the administration. Why did you see fit to launch this tour?

FCC COMMISSIONER ANNA GOMEZ

Yes. Thank you for having me. It's really great to be here. I launched this First Amendment Tour to bring attention to this administration's campaign of censorship and control. And I want to make it clear, this is an administration-wide campaign.

We can start with the Federal Communications Commission, which is an important regulator of communications companies, including the broadcasters. We've seen the FCC launch investigations into broadcasters because of their editorial decisions in their newsrooms and also launch investigations against public broadcasters under the guise of investigating whether they are complying with their obligations as a noncommercial broadcaster or whether they're violating the sponsorship identification rules. We've seen the FCC threaten tech companies for their decisions to moderate content to meet their customers' desire to have fact-checking or to not see content that they don't want to see. So, these are private companies that are making these decisions.



We've seen the FCC investigate irregularities for their fair hiring practices. And but again, throughout the administration, what have we seen? It attempted to shutter the Voice of America and Radio Martí.

We've seen them go after law firms, either because of who they represent or because of who works with their law firms that spoke out against the administration. We've seen them go after former administration officials that have spoken out against either the administration or given the fact that the election was actually not stolen in 2020. We've seen them threaten and fire Democratic commissioners at independent commissions. We've seen them go after the universities and try to control what they teach, who they make students, who they hire to do that teaching.

We've seen them banning unions, arresting protesters and we've seen them target content at our Smithsonian institutions because of content that they don't like. And really an attempt to rewrite history. We've seen them retaliate against any possible critic. So this is an administration-wide effort to censor and control, and it's very alarming, and it has an effect.

The point of all of these actions is to chill speech to stop people from speaking out. So when you fire commissioners, Democratic commissioners at independent commissions because they themselves have spoken out, that is an attempt to stop others from speaking. When you go after former administration officials, what you are telling people is don't you dare be a whistleblower because we will come after you and we will retaliate against you. When you see news, corporate parents of news providers of broadcasters, telling their broadcasters to tone down their criticisms of our administration or push out the executive producer of 60 Minutes, the head of NBC News because of concerns about retribution from this administration because of corporate transactions. That is a chilling effect.

I have broadcasters that tell me, they tell the reporters to please be careful about how they report news about this administration. That is exactly what I don't want to hear. Freedom of the press requires journalists that are able to do their job without interference from their corporate parents. We are not seeing that today because of the actions of this administration. And it is so dangerous. We all need to understand what is happening and we need people to speak up and to push back because the only way to beat a bully is to punch the bully back and we need that to happen with this administration before it continues to erode our freedoms.

The First Amendment is a pillar of our democracy and we want to make sure that everyone can speak freely whether we agree with that speech or not. It doesn't matter what my bias is. What matters is that we let journalists do their job and we let Americans speak freely as our Constitution guarantees that we can do. When I was sworn in on my first day as a commissioner, I swore to uphold the Constitution and that is what I'm doing right now through this tour.



JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Thank you, Commissioner. Yeah, that deserves a round of applause because when the Commissioner mentions firing of other Commissioners, that's actually something that's happening. Two Federal Trade Commissioners, a Commissioner from this Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. The list goes on and on of people being fired by the president illegally to shut down their speech because they find that speech so dangerous.

And you know, we're here to talk about the impacts on L.A., but I can't sit here and fail to note how brave you've had to be, I'm not going to continue flattering you. I promise I'm not going to embarrass you.

FCC COMMISSIONER ANNA GOMEZ: Go on.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS: But like it takes it takes bravery to stand up in a moment like this. It really does. And that bravery is going to make or break our democracy. A couple months ago, Free Press had an event with folks from Hungary and the Philippines and Poland, and they talked about what happened during the authoritarian takeovers of their countries. And they said it looks really similar to what's happening in the U.S. right now. So that's why we take this so seriously because our ability to protest is part of our ability to protect our democracy.

I want to go to Alex because Alex is the CEO of a FCC-regulated broadcast station here in Los Angeles, LAist at 89.3 FM, right? That's your. It's noncommercial. It's an NPR affiliate. Alex, in addition to the attacks from the administration on diversity, equity, and inclusion, the FCC is also obviously harassing broadcasters. You told me when we spoke last week that there's an open investigation into LAist that the FCC is pursuing right now. I also know that the Trump administration has proposed completely wiping clean the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which provides funding for stations like yours so they can maintain independence and not be beholden to corporate agendas. How is all this impacting your ability to serve Angelenos?

ALEJANDRA "ALEX" SANTAMARIA, LAIST

Thank you. Great question. Southern California Public Radio, formerly known as KPCC, is really LAist. And the branding is really just to reflect the multimedia platform that we've become, whether it's on the dot com or different platforms that we're trying to reach the community, and the public support during this time, I think, is also a testament to the work that we are doing. You know, one of the things that I was talking to our editor-in-chief is that the good news is that journalists are used to working under pressure,



right y'all? It's no secret that often you get a lot of resistance from people that you're trying to hold to account. And that's not any different today than it is.

Obviously, there is a heightened impact and concern now more than ever. So, we've taken a really, really hard look at our budgets. If the CPB funding goes away, the federal funding, if they claw it back for fiscal year 26 and 27, it represents about 4% of our budget, 1.6, almost \$1.7 million per year. If you reflect that in terms of the newsroom, it's probably about 13 in terms of headcount, which really limits the ability to hold folks to account and to really do the work when you're very limited in resources. So, obviously the impact can really be felt, and also in planning for the future we've had to make some tough decisions, and recently had a round of layoffs, and as we're planning for fiscal year 26, you have to consider, do you plan with or without the funding? And so it really is all over the country a big consideration.

And then on the question of the FCC investigation we are one of a handful of stations and you know, LAist has always been very diligent in not only adhering to the FCC rules in our underwriting, which is our sponsorship funding on the radio, but also documenting it. So, we feel very confident that we are ready to address any questions. Also, because we're so organized and so prepared, you know, it still takes a heavy lift to be able to submit all of the things that are being asked of us. There are legal fees that we're taking on that we didn't have budgeted and things like that. So it is concerning.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

So you're talking about 13 people in the newsroom. When we talked the other day, you talked about investigative reporting.

ALEJANDRA "ALEX" SANTAMARIA, LAIST

Yeah.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

And the impact there. You know, what are some of the issues that we're used to hearing about LAist that you fear we might not have access to should the budget cuts come through?

ALEJANDRA "ALEX" SANTAMARIA, LAIST

You know, I think public media is uniquely positioned and that we serve a public good. And so at the foundation of everything that we do, we did receive recently a grant to fund two investigative reporters and one editor that is really all about watchdog reporting. And so at the sacrifice of other positions possibly, but really our focus is going to remain, especially with all of the disaster relief that is expected to come in, and we saw what happened during COVID and the recent investigations that we uncovered



in Orange County. And you know, we suspect that there's going to be a lot of those stories that we're going to uncover.

So, we're really proud of the tiny but mighty newsroom that we have in that they're hyperfocused on uncovering the things that people are just not taking the time to look into. Public records and also connecting the dots and doing that labor that takes so many hours. And also now I think the community recognizes us as a place to let us know when they believe things are possibly not, you know, being done correctly. So we're really proud of kind of hanging our hat on that and doing more of the work. So, you know, it's just a matter of prioritizing, and right now we know that that work is needed more than ever.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Yeah. Thank you so much. I'm definitely concerned about how the FCC chair in particular is wielding his regulatory authority to threaten broadcasters into submission.

But I'm also tracking a plan that he laid out in a chapter that he wrote for Project 2025, which is a far-right extremist plan for government takeover currently being administered by the administration. In that plan, he talks about the FCC claiming authority to regulate social media platforms.

In your book, *Algorithms of Oppression*, Dr. Noble, you wrote extensively about how algorithms engage in discrimination. What the FCC chair is proposing is not only to look the other way on that discrimination, but to actually force social media platforms to leave up hate and lies even though they're private independent companies. Can you talk a little bit about the implications of that? How will it impact free expression? Free expression for women and people of color given the research that you've done about how online algorithms are actually already driving people to racism and sexism?

DR. SAFIYA NOBLE, UCLA

Yeah, sure. Well, one of the things we know is that there's a bit of a misnomer that social media platforms are fully free speech spaces, right? So, we know in fact that there are a variety of processes that are involved both automated and with human beings in moderating content, taking down content all over the world and that has to do of course with compliance with the law in the countries where social media platforms and search engines and other kinds of digital media platforms operate. And I think we have seen that there's actually been more of an erosion of free speech with the rise of big tech platforms because we have a situation where the social media firms are actually quite selective in what kind of content they allow to proliferate and what kind they don't

And more and more these platforms are complying, capitulating, working with right-wing authoritarian regimes. In fact, we've seen right-wing politics collude with social media companies and big tech



companies to topple Western liberal democracies all over the world. In fact, also right here in the United States. So, I think the first thing we kind of have to understand is that social media platforms are not just a free-for-all. Anything you say goes. In fact, one of the other ways that they undercut free speech is by throttling journalists and the media. And so, we know that for example, companies like Google have entered into agreements to suppress news media. Australia and Canada, you can look to those countries to see how they've responded. But we certainly have a lot of challenges then for journalists to inform the public and help us have a sense of understanding what's going on. So I think this is really important.

But algorithmically we also have the kind of suppression and misrepresentation of lots of people and communities and ideas as well. And so, for example, the kind of harassment and threats that women and people experience online impedes their ability to participate in public life. And this is really important for people to understand. If you are on the internet and you are harassed and harangued relentlessly either by individuals or by coordinated attacks, by bots and others, other coordinated actors, that will drive you off of the internet and we have lots and lots of evidence of how that happens.

In fact, in 2018, Amnesty International reported that 34% of women have experienced threats directly online and Black women are 84% more likely to experience threats and harassment online than white women. So, this is very important when we think about the kinds of ways that this is implicated in both suppressing our free speech but also suppressing other types of participation, whether it's participating in voting, campaigning, politics, education. In fact, one of the greatest threats right now with the anti-diversity, equity and inclusion efforts by the administration is directly suppressing the speech and work of women of color and Black women in particular in the United States, but certainly more broadly women and girls. We see this.

I think the most pronounced kickoff to this was the firing or pressure to fire Claudine Gay, the president of Harvard. And we see in fact the threats to academic freedom are actually part of the threats to free speech. So, now we have scholars as well as journalists, lawyers, researchers of all stripes who have keywords they cannot use. Talk about a suppression of not just speech but the ability to engage in some of the most important activities that we need in society, which includes everything from medical research to climate research to the kind of research on society and social problems.

So, if we cannot talk about social problems because the words that are associated with social problems are also illegal, then we have to really understand what kind of collapse that is creating and will continue to create for our society. So, I think these are some of the things that are so important, and I'll just put a finer point on this. Just last week, in the bill that was voted on by the House, was kind of sneaking in this language about a 10-year moratorium on any AI regulation. So while there's this effort for us, both scholars and community organizers, researchers, policy people, of course, leadership of Free Press, to



think about how do we create a fair and open space for engagement, we also now are facing a 10-year moratorium on even being able to work on these issues. So, I think we're in, you know, it's a 10 out of 10 crisis right now that we have to take incredibly seriously.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Yeah. It just strikes me how scared the administration is of the truth being exposed, of us understanding what's happening around us, that we have a list of banned words.

DR. SAFIYA NOBLE, UCLA

Well, it's so interesting because the right in this country, and even moderate Republicans have always been the biggest free speech champions. In fact, have advocated vociferously for the KKK and neo-Nazis and and other kinds of most extreme organizations to have the right to have free speech. And you know many of us probably in this room were even raised with the notion that the way that you deal with hate speech is to meet it with more speech. So what indeed we have is a complete perversion even of their own ideology, which is to suppress any kind of speech, and in fact as the Commissioner has laid out in 2025, allow the hate speech to stand and suppress any ability to speak back to it. And you're right, the ability to speak truth to power right now is the topic of the day.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Yeah. I mean, this gets back to your tour. This is about control. It's about controlling even the narrative, even the coverage of what is happening in our country and in our communities. So, I want to go back to the Chairman's plan to regulate social media platforms and force them to leave up hate and lies. I know that I know the FCC gets its authority from Congress. So, I guess I have a two-parter for you as the resident lawyer on the panel. First of all, does the commission have authority to do this? And second of all, would that be constitutional?

FCC COMMISSIONER ANNA GOMEZ

So, the section that I'm sure everybody knows that protects the content platforms from liability for either the content that users post on their platforms or that or for their moderation of user content comes from section 230 of the Communications Act, which is our authorizing statute at the Federal Communications Commission. But to your exact question, which is did Congress tell us to do anything with Section 230? No. Section 230 does not actually give any assignment to the FCC to regulate how content is moderated under Section 230. But the argument that we are hearing that's being raised is that the section that deals with moderation about moderating objectionable content has a good faith clause in it, and that for some reason that can either be interpreted or there can be rules based on that. But that's actually under current Supreme Court precedent. It is not the fact.



The fact is if Congress wants to act to amend Section 230 to address a lot of the issues that we see with content moderation, that is for Congress to do, and if they want to give the FCC an assignment in that regard, we can then do so. Now is it constitutional? No, it's not, because for all the problems that we've heard about moderation of content algorithms, other countries interfering and promoting different types of speech, these are private companies and the First Amendment prohibits government interference in the speech of any actor and content moderation is considered a form of speech. So, therefore it is unconstitutional for the government to interfere with content with the content platforms' speech.

So, what we're seeing here, as you said, is really about more control and censorship. And what we're seeing, what I'm hearing about with regard to the FCC possibly acting on Section 230 is, I think, a threat to competition, a threat to the First Amendment, and really something that would be harmful to consumers, because as bad as what you said, it is if we ban content moderation to only be able to be done for things that are truly illegal, with things that are truly illegal, then imagine what consumers will have to deal with. And this is the thing about being a private company, is you can set up your company to serve the consumers the way that you want. If you think there's a niche market in only providing content that speaks to absolutely hateful content, then it is your right to actually do that in the United States because we have a First Amendment in the United States. If you want to set up Grandma Patty's knitting circle and you want to moderate any content that has anything to do with anything that's not about knitting and knitting implements, then that is your right. And that is what users want. Users. Women on Pinterest want to be protected from harassment or from hateful, you know, misogynistic speech.

And that is what these content providers are providing. They are providing a consumer, an environment in which they want to thrive. So, eliminating content moderation is just going to leave consumers vulnerable to speech that they themselves find harmful and importantly, remove vital fact-checking, which is something that we all should want to have because we've seen the proliferation of hoaxes. We've seen the damage that mis-, disinformation and malinformation has on our society and on our discourse. But unfortunately, these threats are working because we've seen the platforms already announce an end to fact-checking and removing restrictions on harmful speech. So, like I said, there may be valid reasons to rethink Section 230, but that's really for Congress to do and then not for the FCC.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Thank you, Commissioner. It's not just that the Chairman has proposed this plan. He's also already fired off some letters, right? In fact, some letters that were going after fact-checkers and others that are working with social media platforms. So, the chilling effects have already emerged.

FCC COMMISSIONER ANNA GOMEZ



And we're not just seeing it, by the way, at the FCC. We've seen it through other parts of the administration, including the Federal Trade Commission also initiating investigations for companies on social media content moderation and fact-checkers.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Yeah. And there we don't even have a dissenting Commissioner raising the alarm right now because Commissioner Bedoya and Commissioner Slaughter were illegally let go. Yes. So we're glad we still have you at the FCC. And I want to bring in Gabriel who's been very patient. Thank you for letting the ladies go first here. Listen, Gabriel, you used to be the editor of La Opinión. You still are running Hispanic L.A. You've worked a lot with journalists. Can you speak to the environment that journalists are operating in right now and whether or not they're able to report the truth without fear of retaliation?

GABRIEL LERNER, LA OPINIÓN, HISPANIC L.A.

For the most part, yes. Still, especially in small media like La Opinión, where there is a clear division between the news department and the editorial department. So, those that write the editorials are free to write and those that write the news are reporting on the problems in the life of Latino families under attack, under deportation, under arrest. I would say yes for the most part. For how long I don't know because in the interesting times that we are living in like the Chinese course goes, we are being led to a state based on a cult of personality, corruption, repression and a bed of lies, which with which the freedom of the press is not compatible.

Many Americans think that this will pass in less than four years or with the inevitable passage of time or thanks to the First Amendment. And many think that America is so exceptional that you don't have to do anything because fascism will never happen here. Not true. I compare that to those that dance on the Titanic thinking that it could never sink. Today, journalists must realize that this situation is not normal and that doing nothing is not an option. What makes us confused and this is the rapid pace of the attacks. History is accelerating. The changes are swift. This is a blitzkrieg. This is trying to establish new facts on the ground before anybody reacts. And an impediment to the reaction is the sense of disbelief that we are feeling.

We are living in a government by edicts or decrees called executive orders. And what that means, of course, is that Congress is left behind. Congress is treated as a rubber stamp regardless of who is in control of both Houses. So who is going to complain if in the future one of the edicts dissolves Congress? Who will complain if reporters covering a protest are being jailed? Or if in the future, one of those edicts closes newspapers? In this state of shock and confusion, those of us that came from other countries, even like me almost 40 years ago, we have an advantage. Our advantage is that we know what happened there and we know that it can happen here. We already saw this or a version of this. And so we are still a



democratic society, but the guarantees are being dismantled. Even when 73% of Americans say that the freedom of the press is still extremely or very important, we must act, but first we must understand and be ready. Don't capitulate in advance and of course, prepare for the worst and hope for better.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Thank you. Gabriel is also a poet if you couldn't tell by those remarks. That's beautiful.

You know, I'm so glad to hear that there is still some editorial independence at La Opinón and a lot of other places, but we also just saw over the course of the past six months, the entire L.A. Times editorial board leaving because of the owner's capitulation to the administration, the incoming administration at the time. I was just on a panel with Robert Greene, who was on the board a few weeks ago. We were at Cal State Long Beach, and he was talking about why he chose to leave the editorial board because he did not feel they had the independence necessary to do their jobs and deliver the facts to Angelenos and others who read the Times across the U.S.

So, we have about eight minutes left with this panel before we go to Q&A. And I wanted to get from each of you just a couple minutes each. What should citizens, activists, lawyers, media makers, journalists, the people who are listening, who are here today, who are with us on the livestream, what do you want them to know? What do you want them to do? And I think we'll maybe just start with Alex and come back this way if that's okay.

ALEJANDRA "ALEX" SANTAMARIA, LAIST

Well, I want to talk for a minute real quick about what makes LAist so special and really all of public media across this country. You know, the big reason why I was so attracted to come here is because it really is positioned to serve the public good. And I think, you know, without us having a paywall, our journalism and anyone who wants to access high-quality fact-based reporting, that's what we're about. And we're not driven by the clickbaits or the headlines that, you know, we always say the car chases necessarily, no offense, but we really stick with stories longer because of the public interest and we really dig deeper than I think most people. So, you know I feel like our team is still very highly motivated to continue to do the work to the degree that you know they face any issues. I think that everybody is up for the challenge and going to continue to do the work regardless.

I'd say that what we ask for is support, and you know we are it's a it's a great public and private balance of how we operate, so that in our, we're going to start a drive very soon, and so the more support that we get to be able to offset some of the loss of funding that it will likely is looking very likely, I think that that's what in the public ecosystem that I live in now, I think that's the biggest thing that we can ask for



a lot of support and we're going to continue to do and hold ourselves to the highest standards and and fight the fight.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Thank you, Alex. Free Press Action will definitely be supporting you in Congress as well, making sure that we're doing everything we can to preserve the important funding that keeps you all independent. Gabriel?

GABRIEL LERNER, LA OPINIÓN, HISPANIC L.A.

I was expelled from high school in 1971. That was a few years ago. And it was because some of the policemen in plainclothes that used to work in my high school saw me saying something to somebody, and a few months after that, I was notified that my name appeared in some list of troublemakers. This was before the government that disappeared and killed 30,000 people. That was a previous military government. and yet I left the country never to come back. 1972.

This, in almost 50 years of being a working journalist made me able to recognize that we are living in a sustained campaign to intimidate, manipulate and muzzle the institutions that hold power accountable. And this is an editorial not by me but by the National Catholic Reporter. I can recognize that attacks on the press can be an introduction to regime change.

So you ask what we can do. An authoritarian regime relies on disinformation, demoralization and fear and they are afraid of information and organized resistance. So our first responsibility is to confront misinformation with information. Let's stop pretending that there are two equal sides to every story, reporters. Let's stop seeking an often falsely balanced representation of every issue, always giving each side equal consideration. Let's stop trying to rationalize the other side. Let's not think that we journalists and the media are immune because we are not. Like the courts, the universities, the lawyers, the media is essential to keep our hopes alive. When tyranny wins, they are destroyed. And that is why we are next.

So let's begin now to organize our legal defense. Let's create spaces of relative safety. In Argentina, the attack on the press started with self-censorship. We are not yet in that place mainly, mostly. But then came economic pressure, blacklisting of journalists, censorship of all publications, arrests, interventions, expropriation, closure of publications up to the disappearance and murder of 131 journalists, not including dozens of students of journalism. So let's learn from our experience in other countries. Let's learn from history.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Thank you, Gabriel. Dr. Noble?



DR. SAFIYA NOBLE, UCLA

I think the new threats are old threats. The arrests of today's anti-war protesters are no different than the arrests of those protesting Vietnam, the wars in Central America or Gaza. I think we have to remember history and we need journalists to remind us of the red scare of McCarthyism of the Night Writers and the reign of terror that led to the rise of Jim Crow and the Black Codes and U.S. apartheid. I think the threats against students, professors, community members and educational institutions are completely intertwined with the threats against media and journalists. And we have to be completely clear about that and we need the media reporting on that.

This coordinated effort to undermine public goods and public institutions is a cornerstone of this administration and we have to have the courage to speak up and speak back and speak against that. And I would just say that the lawsuits right now, including the latest one launched against the University of California this morning to the firings of key media people, is a crisis. It's a shot. It's the flare that's going up and we've got to notice and we've got to see what's happening and we've got to respond to it. So I think in this room and for those watching, it is incumbent upon investigative journalists and journalists to really help us understand this moment.

But I also call in the artists to help storytell and help us understand and make sense of this moment and what will be lost. We have our elders here who've just spoken and shared with us the crisis and the consequences and we can see that from all around the world as well as right here. We have our own long histories of suppression of free speech. And I think we need to think of this as a free speech movement 2.0, if you will, or the free speech movement of the 21st century that we need to be organized around.

We need to be able to mobilize. We need to support our regulators like Commissioner Gomez here, but we also need to support each other before the self-censorship starts, before the professors are fired and before more students are arrested. This is a really really important moment and these issues are completely intertwined.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Okay, so we'll call in the captain of the free speech movement. Oh yeah, I like the applause. It's a good audience, I have to say. I like free speech 2.0. So, the captain of the movement. Come on in, Commissioner.

FCC COMMISSIONER ANNA GOMEZ



Thank you. Thank you. You know, freedom isn't free. People die for our country and our democratic ideals. So, it is so important that those of us who can speak up. That is what a Federal Communications Commissioner is supposed to do. We are supposed to uphold the Constitution. We are supposed to regulate in the public interest for the benefit of consumers, for the benefit of competition.

So, we all need to call it when we see it. When we see violations of the First Amendment, we need to call it. And the FCC needs to pivot away from these sham investigations and from this harassment, with the end game of chilling speech and move more towards, let's regulate to the benefit of consumers. Let's get broadband deployed to everyone throughout this country. Let's promote localism. You heard the wonderful services that our local broadcasters provide, especially our public broadcasters. That is what we need the FCC to be doing. While it's not doing that, then we need to speak up because capitulation breeds capitulation.

But the good news is courage breeds courage. We need everyone to stay resolute. And I want to echo what all of my colleagues are saying today and that is, let journalists do their jobs because we need them. Our country needs them. So, thank you very much. Thank you, Jessica, for putting all of this together. because I want to make sure we get the word out and that we help people stay resolute in these difficult times.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Thank you, Commissioner, and thank you to all the panelists.

ALEJANDRA "ALEX" SANTAMARIA, LAIST

Jessica, if I can, I did forget to mention a resource that people can go to, they can go to <https://laist.com/support-us/protect-my-public-media> and it takes you to "Protect my public media." Great way for people to be able to even put their name and zip code and then they can send letters in. So I think in support, other than becoming members and supporting public media, I think that that's another way.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

That's wonderful. Thank you, Alex. I'm also going to do a plug. For those of you who are joining us on the livestream, we are going to drop a pledge and it's a pledge to stand against government censorship and control. This is a way for you to join us. In a few minutes, we're going to start taking public comments but we have the pledge that you all can sign and then insert your comments there as well.

But for right now we are actually going to pivot to questions and answers. So, this is not the public mic time where you're going to give feedback to the commissioner, but this is for folks who have any



questions for our panelists. And I'm seeing my colleague Julio put a mic over here. And there's going to be another one over here. So, if you have a question for the panel, please feel free to queue up here. And we have about 12 minutes for this portion.

BRIAN KAREM, WHITE HOUSE COLUMNIST, SALON

Well, I'll do my job as a reporter and ask a question.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Please tell us your name and affiliation, too.

BRIAN KAREM, WHITE HOUSE COLUMNIST, SALON

Hi, I'm Brian Kareem. I'm a White House columnist for Salon. My question is for, I guess, Gabriel, I'll start with you and then I have a question for the Commissioner. The question for you, Gabriel, is what makes you... you're far more optimistic than I am about the status of free speech in this country. And I'd like to know why?

GABRIEL LERNER, LA OPINIÓN, HISPANIC L.A.

I didn't know I was more optimistic than you.

BRIAN KAREM, WHITE HOUSE COLUMNIST, SALON

From hearing you speak, you're far more optimistic than I am.

GABRIEL LERNER, LA OPINIÓN, HISPANIC L.A.

I think we are not organized and that's what prevents me from being optimistic. I think that this venue, this opportunity, it's important in that regard. We can start doing that. What you said, do your job. Do your job, guys. Tell the truth.

BRIAN KAREM, WHITE HOUSE COLUMNIST, SALON

And for the Commissioner, one of the problems in corporate media boils down to the fact that the government, i.e. Donald Trump and his administration have been able to leverage companies because they have additional business with the U.S. government, whether it be in grants, loans, or a number of other areas where they're invested and they have contracts with the government. What can the FCC do about that to guarantee that we are not being able to be leveraged because that remains the key to controlling the U.S. corporate media?

FCC COMMISSIONER ANNA GOMEZ



So the FCC is an independent agency and it was created as an independent agency purposefully. Back in the day, when Congress was thinking about creating the Federal Radio Commission, which became the Federal Communications Commission, it considered putting it in the executive branch, but they decided not to do it because they thought it would be too dangerous to have one person beholden to the President in charge of what was then the communications medium of the day, which was radio. Therefore, they created a multi-member commission. Bipartisan, well actually not multipartisan, it could be, nonpartisan independent agency authorized by Congress and overseen by Congress exactly for this reason.

We have seen Presidents in the past try to exert pressure on the FCC to retaliate against specific broadcasters whether they were radio or television because of coverage they felt wasn't glowing enough about that particular administration. Those chairs, including the very famous Newton Minow, pushed back, and said no, the First Amendment means we cannot interfere with broadcasters' decisions. So that is what the commission should be doing. Like I said, the commission is overseen by Congress.

The Communications Act also is our authorizing statute. The Communications Act prohibits the FCC from engaging in censorship. And what we are doing right now is engaging in censorship because through raised eyebrows and threats and investigations that are not appealable because they're not final actions, we are altering how broadcasters are reporting the news because of the corporate parents' concerns about whatever other form of business they have pending before the government writ large. So we need to make sure that the FCC retains its independence despite what this administration is saying about independent agencies and stops these sham investigations.

BRIAN KAREM, WHITE HOUSE COLUMNIST, SALON

Well, to follow up real quick and sorry, comes from being in the White House.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Last one and then we're going to Verónica.

BRIAN KAREM, WHITE HOUSE COLUMNIST, SALON

One followup. You mentioned Newton Minow. When I interviewed him a few years before he passed, one of the things that he said was that he was disappointed with how the FCC has operated in making sure that the press remains free. Do you agree with that assessment? And more specifically to my first question, what do you think the FCC should do differently?

FCC COMMISSIONER ANNA GOMEZ



I think it's really important that the FCC remain independent and not initiate sham investigations against broadcasters because of their news editorial decisions. And that is what the FCC is doing right now. And it needs to stop doing that.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Thank you.

VERÓNICA VILLAFañE, JOURNALIST AND FOUNDER OF MEDIA MOVES

Hi, I'm Verónica Villafañe and until the end of this week, one of the more than 600 journalists from Voice of America that will no longer have a job. And which was also something that was also very surprising because we were supposed to be editorially independent, mandated as such by Congress. I have so many questions. I've been listening to all of you and each one of you have shared so many things that are right on point but it's still like, what can we do?

My main concern, you mentioned so much about what the FCC should do, Commissioner, but it's not doing. Censorship is happening. And even though you say, well, people need to stand up, there's also they need to have the platform. They need to have the legacy platforms not afraid to support this kind of journalism. And we've seen this by several networks already indicating that there have to be more toned down versions of reporting instead of reporting things straight up. It's a great concern about pulling back the fact-checking of even some news publications. My concern with regards to FCC, we've seen that people have been fired illegally. You're the only one that's left there in the FCC. How safe is your job in order to be able to come forward and be the dissenting voice in that commission?

FCC COMMISSIONER ANNA GOMEZ

Yeah, I mean, we've seen this administration is firing Democrats throughout the government at independent agencies. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Federal Trade Commission, the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the National Labor Relations Board, the Merit Systems Protection Board, the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board. I don't know why I'm still in my position.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Give it a week.

FCC COMMISSIONER ANNA GOMEZ

Well, I may not be in this position throughout my whole term, which would be illegal and disregard the will of Congress because I was confirmed for a term that does not expire for another couple of years but that doesn't mean I can't speak out and that I shouldn't speak out and it isn't going to stop me. I like to say that if I get fired, it isn't because I didn't do my job. It's because I insisted on doing it. And this is what



we need. We need people who have platforms to do so in order to help others. We remain resolute and push back because it's so very important.

And I'm very sorry to hear about your position. The Voice of America is the gold standard worldwide for journalism and seeing what was done at Voice of America is just heartbreaking.

VERÓNICA VILLAFANE, JOURNALIST AND FOUNDER OF MEDIA MOVES

Thank you. And you know, thank you so much also for all of my other colleagues because let me tell you, as I've heard so many attacks to Voice of America, I have to say, I've been really fortunate and privileged to have been part of that team because I have never seen so much diligence in terms of doing the fact-checking, the amount of filters. I mean editors, there's double editors double-checking everything. So when there were accusations that the job wasn't done, it was completely false. And so I just want that on the record because it was incredible.

With regards to now, for Jessica, for Free Press perhaps can address some because the reality is that a lot of journalists, especially if they lose their platform, if they're for whatever reason if a network or a newspaper which are legacy stations and publications they decide to cut back, even though there is that social media space where you can go ahead and voice your opinions, it's a free-for-all over there first of all in terms of you know the attacks as you mentioned. So what can be done in order to protect not only the journalists, but the the public speech from being able to because the thing is like, oh, you if you're targeted, then all of a sudden everybody's going to pile on you if you say something that's true because we are living in a world of misinformation and alternate facts, right? So, I don't know what it is, you know, because we can go ahead and report the truth, but a lot of people out there don't want to hear the truth.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

That's right. Listen, I want to get Rachel in here, too, after you, but I think what Gabriel said was really important. We have to organize. Journalists are so good at reporting the facts and have been working really hard to remain objective, but the very institution of journalism and reporting is under threat, right? And so that's what today is about. It's about us getting organized. It's about us being in community together and raising our voices together.

Not everything is working. We're trying to throw sand in the gears of this administration, but I got to tell you, they're losing a lot more than we're hearing about and they're backing down. We have to continue to be loud about what's going down. I want to invite Rachel and you're going to have the privilege of being the last question and then we're going to conclude the event and move into the listening session.



RACHEL STILLWELL, ATTORNEY

Okay. Thank you very much. I'm Rachel Stillwell. I am an attorney with my own practice here in Los Angeles. I represent the Music First Coalition and Future of Music Coalition before the FCC in matters related to competition in audio and media ownership. Circa 2018-2019, I was able to help recruit a certain number of independent commercial radio stations including several here in Los Angeles to speak up about media ownership regulation, which is a recurring thing that is still going on now. And back then, they were willing to go on record about competition in a way that they're unwilling to do now. So separate docket, but these things are overlapping and the fear has spread there.

And so my question and this matters in part about viewpoint diversity in news and information, but also through music, right? So my question as a lawyer is about procedure, right? We just have this bonkers performative docket in read, delete, delete, delete, that's going on now that we participated in. We have an ownership regulation docket that continues and we have reason to believe that bad things are going to happen. If, like for example, in read, delete, delete, there was no vote there was no publication in the Federal Register. What can we expect at the FCC about procedure and whether and how it's followed and if it's not, what are we anticipating about judicial scrutiny after that?

FCC COMMISSIONER ANNA GOMEZ

Thank you. That's a really good question. So it's not unlike the FCC to put out a public notice that says is there anything that we should do, that's done at the bureau level. Is there anything that we should do about a particular area? What was odd about delete, delete, delete was it sounded like a commission-level document because it talked about we are doing this, we are doing that but it was not voted by Commissioners as you note and there's no specific part of the commission that is targeted. So it is an odd document. And there is a question of how much will the commission comply with the Administrative Procedures Act. Especially since the administration has an executive order on taking action without comment, public comment, where good cause exists.

And good cause is a very amorphous concept unless you're in the Supreme Court, which has in fact spoken multiple times. There are multiple judicial decisions on good cause with regard to needing public comment. The bottom line is if there is a rule in the books that was important enough to seek comment on to have that rule, it is important for the public to comment if the commission is talking about eliminating that rule. And I don't believe that a commission action that does not have the full vote of the commission, will survive judicial scrutiny if rules are just deleted without that commission vote. I am actually not hearing from the commission that they are planning to liberally use this good cause exception.



So I am hopeful that in fact a lot of these rules will come up to vote. They probably won't happen until we have a third Commissioner, Republican Commissioner, from this administration because once that happens, then they'll have a majority and they can take actions at the full commission level.

Right now, we're in an impasse between two Democrats and two Republicans, and so either when the third Commissioner is confirmed or when the other Democratic Commissioner leaves, which he has announced that he's doing, then they'll be able to take action without doing it without cause. So, I am actually hopeful that in fact this commission is not going to do that. But, I am concerned about whatever action it is that they're planning to take on the media ownership.

RACHEL STILLWELL, ATTORNEY

Thank you.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

And thank you for that question as well. You know, they put the public notice out. You know, they used the wrong pronoun. They're generally confused about pronouns. We know we know that. So, I mean, maybe perhaps that's what's going on. Listen, this was excellent. You all really shed light on what's happening right now, both across the nation, around the world, and here in L.A. I want to thank all of our panelists for being here with us. And I want to excuse Dr. Noble and Gabriel and Alex to the audience and keep the Commissioner up here with me.

Part Two: Public Listening Session

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

We are going to pivot to our public listening session. We're going to have folks go ahead and queue up at the mics on the side. Again, for the folks who are catching us on the livestream, there is a pledge that you can fill out so that you too can participate, sign your name and give your feedback about what you're seeing, what you're concerned about, and what you want to see. I think we'll do well. Thank you for moving the mics and thank you all for affording us a minute here as we pivot.

So, Commissioner, you traveled here to Los Angeles outside the Beltway. It's your first stop outside the Beltway on your nationwide tour because you wanted to hear from people, right? And not the same old folks that you hear from every day inside the commission building. And so, we are inviting members of our community to step up here to the mic. We can take, you know, a couple minutes, minute or two, just share any feedback that you have for the Commissioner and, feel free to queue up and we'll just, we'll keep it moving. If folks go on for a really long time, we will tap you on the shoulder just to make sure that everyone gets a chance to get in here. So I think we'll start over here with Dr. Roberts.



DR. SARAH T. ROBERTS, UCLA

Hi, good afternoon. Thank you so much for your time and your courageousness in presenting yourself to the public in this way. We know many of our Congressional members do not have thechutzpah to get in front of their constituents these days.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

If you could also just announce your name.

DR. SARAH T. ROBERTS, UCLA

I shall, after I get through my comedy bit. My name is Dr. Sarah T. Roberts. I'm a professor at UCLA and for 16 years I've been an expert in the content moderation of social media. So I'd love to talk with you. I'm also the granddaughter of a World War II veteran and his spouse and I'm glad they're not here to see the decimation of our democracy because it is the greatest shame of my life. First of all, I just wanted to as a professor mention that there are so many points of connection here between some of the things that have been raised. So, we've been talking about sort of like the issues in the news media. I would say that consolidation and the elimination of local and regional news media has led to a place in which we find ourselves reliant upon social media. So, the issues of how social media are made and what and what they show and what they don't is actually critically important to the functioning of our sort of social and political life, but that there's a great difference between how social media operates and how we've presumed that most mainstream journalism operates.

First of all, there are no principles for social media operation as they are in journalism. Whether or not you think journalists live up to those codes, they do exist. There is no such editorial page and a social media outlet that you can write a letter to the editor. That's not a viable means of providing feedback. In fact, it's just sort of a miasma of garbage and it's up to the person to sort out where the good information is. But because of the consolidation of the media and the corporate capture of news media by social media, that is increasingly difficult. We talk about a term that is not a normal term. It's the term of content. So, an article from the New York Times, a local report from LAist and a you know hair loss product ad. They're all the same. They're all content, right? And so that's, you know, that's the first thing I want to kind of articulate as part of the problem here.

But the issue of content moderation is complicated in the sense that the public has been led to believe that it's one thing and that includes our elected officials. What is content moderation in essence? I'm here to tell you that it's a brand management function for social media with its true customers, who are advertisers. Now, a lot of the times, as you've indicated, the market dictates what kind of content will be on the platform, and most people don't want to look at gore or, you know, Nazi invective or whatever.



But, as we've seen, the market has changed and the market will bear that kind of material. And so, there's no incentive in essence for social media companies to really follow the kinds of norms that we have sort of put into them. So, we've gotten to this place where I think it's deeply cynical first of all for the right to want to attack content moderation because they wouldn't be here if it weren't for social media. This has been a degradation that has put them in power. So it behooves them to let things ride, but in fact they're hungry for power and they want more control.

But I wonder if you can say something about, I mean I'll say it, I think the lack of regulation of social media has led to a situation where they made all the rules and they make the rules favorable to themselves. And sometimes that coincides with the public's best interest, but I'm going to just assert through my years of research that that is a knock-on effect and we're lucky if that's the case, but when it's not, it won't be. And so I'm with Dr. Noble, who says, let's actually not champion the tech sector. It's a corporate entity that has immense global power, too much power, and almost no regulatory apparatus to keep it in line. And that has led us to this crisis. Thank you.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Thank you, Dr. Roberts. We're going to actually let the Commissioner take in some of this feedback and then she'll have a few minutes towards the end to respond, and Congressman Ruiz is going to join us in progress and he will also respond to the public testimony. So, we're going to go back and forth between these mics to keep it interesting unless I get a dirty look from the camera folks over there.

BRIAN KAREM, WHITE HOUSE COLUMNIST, SALON

The dirty look would be at me, but that's all right. Again, my name is Brian Karem. I'm a White House and have been a White House correspondent since the Reagan era. I write a column for Salon today. I want to speak to a couple of things that we need in this business. And if you're here to listen, God bless you for doing it because there are very few in government who will. I have engaged many people in government. I'll just go from a sentence.

What we need is an independent media, a viable independent media that cannot be leveraged by government contracts, is well-staffed with experienced, seasoned reporters from every facet of life. To quote Ben Bedikian, the former editor of the Washington Post, our job is to stand up. Our job is to ask the question. Our job is not to care about what our editors think, the money that we make, our career, or even what we think. We're the representatives of the people in that room. We're the ones that ask the questions.

I see some of us doing their job. I'm tired. I'll be honest with you. Forty-three years of doing this crap. I've been arrested numerous times. I've been jailed four times to protect a confidential source. I had to



fight Donald Trump three times in court during his first administration after he tried to yank my press pass. I've been attacked. I've been vilified. And I don't care. Quite honestly, I don't. I know the job when I got it. But I'm tired of talking. I'm tired of listening to people talk and do nothing.

The government needs to do some really desperate, deep dive things to make journalism viable. First of all, bust up the media monopolies. Second of all, I think it's a Medill study in this last year, 45% of the counties in this government, 45% of them do not have local media, right? No local newspaper, no local radio station, nothing. And in 45% of those counties, Donald Trump won 90% of those in the last election, many of them by landslide. Without information, without vetted factual information, we're doomed. And I'm not here to tell you, everyone loves to say, we're here to preach the truth. No. Hell no. There's 10,000 religions in this world. Every one of them has their truth. I'm here to give you the facts, vetted factual information.

The name of It sounds like a plug, but the name of my podcast is called Just Ask the Question because of something that Helen Thomas told me on the very first day I walked into the White House. She said, "Brian, it doesn't matter if they answer the question. It doesn't matter what the answer is. Just ask the question. That way, they cannot deny that it's been on the record." Then Sam Donaldson told me that he'd teach me how to yell so I'd get my question answered. And him and Helen went off in a veritable lovefest.

So that was my first day in the White House and I loved it. It is a great place to be. It is a great career for people. And why I am not as optimistic is because what depresses me the most is the weakness that we have shown since Donald Trump came back into office. People that I have respected are afraid to ask a question. People that I know for many years are not even allowed in the press pool to ask the questions. I want to tell you briefly the things that you need to understand.

The White House Correspondents Association worked hand-in-hand with Donald Trump during the first 10 days of this administration to produce the President's schedule. We call it daily guidance. They produced it because Trump didn't have anybody to do it. That's not our job. And the White House Correspondents Association did that because they thought it would curry favor with the President and he wouldn't be as hard on us as he has been.

The only way, I forget who said it, the only way to stand up to a bully is to punch him in the nose. Thank you. That's exactly what you have to do.

ANNA GOMEZ, FCC COMMISSIONER
I'm not condoning violence.



BRIAN KAREM, WHITE HOUSE COLUMNIST, SALON

And I do not mean it physically. I mean it metaphorically, but you do have to stand up and I have seen people do it and they haven't been backed. And in fact, members of Congress say, "Brian, this is a great idea." I have testified in Congress for laws, shield laws, so that reporters can protect themselves from being jailed like I was. You would think that this would pass because as someone else mentioned, the bill that I testified for was backed and written by Jamie Raskin and Jim Jordan of all people, and it can't pass because Congress doesn't have the huevos to do it.

And then you go back to SLAPP legislation. You've got to do something about strategic lawsuits against public participation. There needs to be national standards for that. Donald Trump is an expert at using it. He doesn't expect to win any of these lawsuits against CBS or anyone else. But because they have vested interest in the government and additional government contracts, they will react the way Donald Trump wants, knowing full well that if they do, he will back off. It's a stratagem. So I. Yes. I ask you, sorry I'm a reporter. When I just ask that you make a stance. You are here listening to us.

I ask that you do something because I'm telling you from reporters in the field, we'll do our job. We want to do our job. We don't have the backing of the people above us and we don't have the backing from our government to do our job. Thank you.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Thank you. We're going to go over here to Carmelita.

CARMELITA RAMIREZ SANCHEZ, BOYLE HEIGHTS ARTS CONSERVATORY

Hi, I'm Carmelita Ramirez Sanchez, Boyle Heights Arts Conservatory. We're also the home for KQBH, LPFM. We're a low power FM radio station in Los Angeles and our surrounding area is about 80,000 more or less, 80 to 100,000 population. And one of the conversations we have often about media in our space is that our young people are not included in the conversation. If you go into media rooms across Los Angeles, if you go into media rooms, you don't hear their voices. You don't see them in this space.

So, it's a little hard to tell young people that they should trust us when they don't see themselves in your newsrooms. They don't see themselves in front of the story. They don't see themselves represented either in their age, in where they're from, in how they think. So, it is very important, I think, as we're trying to unpack free speech and the DEI version of it, that the inclusion has to include age. Our young people flock to social media because we are not giving them anything that represents them. And I think that as we move forward, we need to put their voices. We need a complete third of our on-air



personalities on our hosts, our reporters are under the age of 25. You really don't see that represented when we sit down and talk about free speech.

So, it's not really a question. It's more of a suggestion that as we move on in newsrooms that we include those young people whose voices we really should be listening to. That's it really.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Thank you Carmelita. I just want you to stay here for a sec. 101.5 FM here in this 10-ish mile radius, right? It's a low power FM and the opportunity to apply for those came from public policy. We passed a bill through Congress, the Local Community Radio act. A lot of us spent a lot of time on the Hill to pass that bill...

CARMELITA RAMIREZ SANCHEZ BOYLE HEIGHTS ARTS CONSERVATORY

And a lot of us spent a lot of time together.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Yes, we did create that station and this is the service that you're providing to the community is notable. So, I just want to thank you.

CARMELITA RAMIREZ SANCHEZ BOYLE HEIGHTS ARTS CONSERVATORY

We have 70 shows on the air. 70. Thank you.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Thank you, Carmelita.

CARMELITA RAMIREZ SANCHEZ BOYLE HEIGHTS ARTS CONSERVATORY

You can tune in to 101.5 FM or kqbhla.com.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

And that was her radio voice. Did you hear it, y'all? Thank you. I want to acknowledge Congressman Raul Ruiz who's joined us in progress. Thank you for making it here from California's 25th district. He not only represents the desert area, but also sits on the committee that oversees the Federal Communications Commission. So, we're going to go on with public comment and come over here to Senator Leyva. But then we'll come back at the end for some remarks.

CONNIE LEYVA, KBCR PUBLIC MEDIA, FORMER STATE SENATOR

Thank you very much, Connie Leyva. I am the executive director at KBCR Public Media. We are the Inland



Empire PBS and NPR station. We also have the only FNX, First Nations Experience, which is 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 364 day, 365 days a year of Native and Indigenous content. So, I'm sure Donald Trump hates us too because we believe in diversity, equity and inclusion.

I just wanted to and I really appreciate that everyone says diversity, equity, and inclusion because when people are trying to diss that particular acronym DEI, people can easily dismiss it. So, we need to say those words. Commissioner, thank you for being brave. Thank you for having courage. One of my favorite sayings is courage is not the absence of fear, but the knowledge that something is more important. So, thank you. Jessica, Thank you for reaching out to me to be here, I appreciate it.

And Congressman, you don't know me, but I did walk on your first campaign way back in the day when I was in the labor movement. So, we're so happy that you're still in Congress. I just want to advocate for the Inland Empire. KBCR is the public media station, as I said, out there. We are working hard to build our newsroom. I am so sorry, Alex, about your reporters you had to lay off. When I got to KBCR two and a half years ago, we had about a quarter-time reporter. We now have three and we're super excited about that and we want to continue to grow that. I think we need to think outside the box.

We are lucky we got our CPB funding. CPB and Harvard are my two new heroes standing up to the Trump administration for what is right and for the truth and the facts. But we also have to think outside the box. Part of that I'm working with one of my colleagues, former colleagues in the Senate and making tech companies pay. They are the ones who have ruined local journalism with some of their platforms. So why shouldn't they pay a portion of that? Why shouldn't they pay to make sure we have people on the ground who are actually reporting?

For us in the Inland Empire, it's incredibly important. We love all y'all here in L.A., but we got a lot to offer in the Inland Empire as well. So for us to have more reporters on the ground is critically important so we can tell the stories. I could go on and on, but I don't want to do that. I want everyone to have their time to speak. Commissioner, thank you. And I would just say, let's think differently. Let's think outside the box. Let's remain courageous. We're not going to fail because we can't fail. This is too important. Thank you.

CURT COUTINE, LAUSD TEACHER

My name is Curt Coutine. I've never been around such an esteemed group of questioners in my life. That's quite amazing. And I'm very impressed that there's journalists that are here who question other journalists. So makes me wonder why I'm here. But no, my name is Curt Coutine. I'm a teacher. I guess I represent the public in that I'm a teacher in L.A. Unified.



And there's another issue in terms of complete honesty. I was complete I was a full-time teacher up until 2022. Now I teach part-time because fortunately, I still have a pension because I decided many years ago I knew that private pensions were going to go away and I went into the public sector just in terms of advanced thinking.

Kind of like the person who had just asked the question, who by the way that's the greatest thing I heard today, that I think now you well I guess during your career you felt courageous enough to challenge and so, what I'm wondering about is I'm sort of a free speech absolutist. I'm less worried about content moderation that they're going to allow all kinds of things on the internet whatever, as long as they don't prevent fact-checking because I have family members who are off on the right-wing edge, which includes many of you probably are as well, hopefully, hopefully not but so and they're not going to be convinced by anything, but you want people.

As I think the previous questioner said, you want people to actually hear the facts. And what worries me the most is when that information is not even allowed to get out there, which even with the previous administrations, whether it was Republican or Democratic, unless my memory is poor, you still were allowed, there wasn't this censorship, as we were talking with Ms. González from the Free Press before it started. I'm concerned about when companies, whether it's a newspaper that caves on their own, aren't allowed to present the facts or ask the questions or ask follow-up questions.

That's what always bothers me about White House correspondents and any kind of question. You never get enough follow-up. So, my question is, it seems like our last bastion is the courts, except for the Supreme Court, unfortunately, most of the time. And the thing is, even when the courts rule, that's another thing that's unprecedented. They can just choose to ignore what they get away with ignoring the court ruling, you know, whether it's the deportation, you know, to El Salvador, we all know about that, and other places.

So, I'm wondering, maybe it's more for the Congressperson as well as for the from the Free Press. How can we get the administration to follow courts when they actually rule that things are unconstitutional like you were saying? And also, why don't these news agencies at various levels take advantage of the Free Press and whatever freepress.net, give a plug, when they offer services? I know that there's acquisitions and mergers, but part of it is they're afraid that the FCC will rule against them.

But the thing is they could appeal that and show that they're denying them the renewal of their license or whatever because it's being done not because they're, you know, it's being done for a political reason. So, they could appeal it to a court. So, versus just taking the quote easy way out because you know as you said the bully is going to keep on going after you, you know they're going after ABC again. So, why



don't they take advantage of the Free Press or or why don't they take advantage of the fact they know they would win in court and do it? And number two is so that's one question and the second question is what do you do to get them to actually follow court rulings when they rule that things are unconstitutional and they have to stop doing what they're doing?

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Thank you, Curt. That's the million-dollar question of the hour for sure. We're going to let the Commissioner and the Congressman respond to the whole group towards the end here. But thank you for those questions. I have some of those questions myself. Efarin.

EFRAIN ESCOBEDO, CENTER FOR NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT

Yes. Thank you, Jessica, and thank you to Free Press for putting this together and for building out a time for public comment. A lot of times we get the panels but not the conversations. Thank you, Congressman, for driving such a long way to be part of this conversation as well as you, Commissioner Gomez, for being here as well. My name is Efrain Escobedo. I am President/CEO of Center for Nonprofit Management here in Southern California. That's my day job. And then as a fierce advocate for independent community-based media, I also serve on the board of the Latino Media Collaborative as well as Cal Matters, which is our statewide more policy focused nonprofit media.

And I just wanted to say two points of consideration. I think the first one is how to bridge this conversation beyond just media, right? How is media going to partner with the other sectors, particularly with other nonprofit sectors, with community sectors? I've spent my entire career really achieving great things with media and community partnerships. And I feel that because we let those slide over the last 10 years, media kind of stands a little bit alone because they said we're going to focus on facts and maybe not have as much resources to focus on community partnerships and advanced campaigns.

Gabriel was here earlier. I said, "Hey, remember when in 2006 the best way we fought was Spanish-language media partnered with community and we naturalized a million people? That changed things, right?" I think that muscle was lost. So, it's how do we bridge in this time to say let's rekindle those partnerships. The media shouldn't go at it alone.

And then I think the second is whatever you all can do to be louder on the stance of we will go to any lengths to protect free speech and we encourage everyone to exercise their free speech and here's your protection is so critical. The losses we're seeing in media or the sort of any rolling back of media being too outspoken is having real issues for us in the nonprofit sector. I get calls every day for the last three months, it's overwhelming, of nonprofit organizations who have either been told by lawyers to remove things off their website. Most recently, I've been getting calls and I have a running tally. It's now at about



\$120 million in funding had has been in many instances illegally cancelled through projects and people being laid off today. Right?

Without a free independent media that can cover these issues, this is a silent thing that's happening. We're dismantling the entire nonprofit sector by starving it from funds. And I think many of them are sort of feeling that impact is starting to say, well, this is kind of right under the radar because I had a hundred staff, now I have 40. I got to protect the 40. And we need these conversations and wherever spaces we can say, "No, we're going to protect free speech. You should still exercise it." We need that. So, whatever message you can continue to send folks and whatever you can do to protect media to make sure they're covering what's happening right now at a community-based organization level is so critical. So, thank you again for taking time to listen to these comments and for both of your leadership. Thanks.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Thank you.

FRANCESCO CAÑAS, RADIO JORNALERA

Hi, I just want to thank you so much for hosting this magnificent panel and thank the Commissioner and Congressman as well for their presence. So, my name is Francesco Cañas. I am part of Radio Jornalera, which is a Spanish-language digital media network with studios in several major U.S. cities as well as in Latin America.

So, my point was very much echoing what Efrain said. So Commissioner, you've stated that the First Amendment and a free press are pillars of democracy and that the FCC must continue to promote diversity, localism, and competition in the media. So, from our experience organizing with immigrant and working-class communities, we see how these principles are under threat due to censorship of dissenting voices and the rise of racist and authoritarian policies. So, we just wanted to really emphasize the importance of concrete measures to ensure that community media outlets, especially those serving immigrant and working-class communities, have the support and protection necessary to continue to exercise their right to free expression without fear of retaliation or exclusion from the media ecosystem.

And this especially goes for those who are targeted due to their migratory status and those that face threats of deportation due to that migratory status. So, at the moment the immigrant community is being targeted not only due to racism and xenophobia, but also really in order to erode the right to due process as a power grab for the right. It's really a lane that they've been utilizing, as I'm sure you all know, to continue to chip away at limitations on their power. So, this invitation is for the Commissioner and the Congressman, but also for everyone here, this wonderful community of journalists and academics that are present today. Whatever actions you're able to take towards this end, towards what I



just spoke of as well as Efrain and to build solidarity and work together for the benefit of our society, for the benefit of a free press, right? For the benefit of civil liberties. I really just want to emphasize and urge all of us to continue doing this work and to connect and organize together. Thank you so much.

RAFAEL AGUSTÍN, CENTER FOR INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

Thank you so much for that comment. By the way, Rafa Agustín, Vice Chair of the Center for Investigative Reporting, which publishes Mother Jones and Reveal. I'm actually formerly undocumented, and I wanted to share how my large mixed-status family, a lot of them from Las Vegas, funny enough, all voted against their interests in this election.

And so much of that has to do with the misinformation or the disinformation and lack of information. And I heard a journalist say that this past election was not a revolt of the American voter, but a revolt of the tech billionaires. And I think we have to actually gather and organize around the very thing that you were talking about earlier, Section 230. Because without a doubt, if tech billionaires are controlling our realities through social media, then we have to do our part to regulate that social media, or else we're going to continue to have results like this over and over again. That was it. Thank you.

ANAIS LOPEZ, BSP RESEARCH

Hi. Sorry, a little shorter than everyone else here. My name is Anais Lopez. I'm a senior analyst at BSP Research. BSP Research is a polling firm and we do research on the American public. We take special care in making sure that we're researching, you know, Latinos, African-American communities, Asian-American communities, Native American communities in the country. And so, our data really makes sure that we take those lenses, from an academic perspective, and we've done work for Free Press.

And I actually wanted to comment on some of the research that we've done in the past. As a young person in the United States, and as someone who spent some time in D.C. and here in California, you kind of, you know, as was just mentioned, you see the deterioration of trust in journalism, the increase in misinformation, disinformation online, and it's really interesting because I was recently looking back at something we did for Free Press about a year ago, before the election.

And many Americans just didn't believe that they had enough news, independent news. And they really couldn't fully participate in elections because they didn't have so many perspectives that they thought was independent of maybe a national discourse. And about half of respondents supported government funding for independent news and they believed more independent news was good for democracy. And you know today, we're seeing a lot of attacks on our journalists and our independent news.



At the same time, you know this one survey that we did found that by a rate of 2 to 1, respondents believe that internet companies should not be forced by the government to share political content on these platforms for them or to moderate this content. And they should be able to moderate hateful or racist speech, even if it's part of like some political ad and stuff. And so, what I thought was really interesting is like a year ago they didn't really know what they wanted. And on one hand, they wanted moderation, on the other hand, they didn't. And I think that is just resonant today as well because what young people are looking at online is very different from what older generations are looking at.

And I think when it comes to how they're getting their news, you know, that same survey found that a lot of them would fact-check using Google. I would say that if we were to run that survey today, a lot would fact check using Chat GPT or Grok. You know, you're on Twitter and they just ask Grok, you know, is this true? And so. How is that changing? How is that changing their perspective of what is real, what is not, right? Are they automatically trusting that output from Chat GPT that they've been so accustomed to going to as their go-to source for fact and reality? Are they actually reading, you know, these journalists' articles and going there, or are they just taking that and then saying whatever the journalist said must be wrong because this is what AI said to me?

And so, it's interesting because as we move forward and as things happen, right, trust in Elon Musk probably has changed a lot over the last year, but maybe that trust in Twitter and Grok hasn't or maybe vice versa. And so, you know, as someone who does data all the time, I think it's really important that we continue doing this research as the world is changing for young people every day as they've grown up in a reality where this is their reality. They don't know what it's like to open The New York Times every day, you know, 50 years ago, whatever. This is the world that they live in today. And so, sorry...

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

It's okay. Just say it, we're old.

ANAIS LOPEZ, BSP RESEARCH

You know, I want to make this short, but I think that when I was talking to journalists during the election that had been doing it for such a long time, they almost couldn't fathom the reality of not going to these trusted news sources. And I had so many conversations with them saying like, you know, no, that's not the case. and I remember speaking to a journalist for PBS and we were speaking for a very long time and as this one journalist spoke to more and more younger people, they came back to me and said, "You're right. You know, they haven't read a news article in they don't even know, right? They maybe use it for school, but that's not what they really trust. They trust these other things."



And so I think it's really important that you know we have some level of moderation but you know what that is I think everyone can disagree on. So yeah that's my comment.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Thank you.

BRIAN TOWNSEND, PUBLISHER, THE PRECINCT REPORTER

Good afternoon. Can you hear me? Yes. I'm Brian Townsend. I'm also from the Inland Empire. I'm a publisher, not a journalist. And I just wanted to say that as you go around the country as a champion for the free press, a free press and freedom of speech, that you take the time hopefully in that effort to develop and nurture other champions for the cause as you're meeting people. You know, I've been in this. I publish newspapers in San Bernardino, Santa Ana and Long Beach, and there are hundreds of community papers around the country. So, it's not just the big corporate entities that are needing to be saved. We're all trying to survive in this new environment, but they are local. They're hyperlocal and then they're bringing truth to power and we're trying to reimagine ourselves in this new environment.

But we have to remind everybody how essential we are. I was a paper boy when I was six years old. My whole life has been in this business and we're under attack and I think that it's not even about age. My whole life, young people have not read newspapers. We've always tried to fight that issue. How do you bring them into the fold? But what happens is we go, we grow, we have families, we get established in our lives, and then we sit down and read the newspaper. And that's why it's always been 30 and above that read the papers.

But we need to engage them somehow, either through social media or other media outlets, other platforms, to hear their voices because I was part of a panel in Washington D.C. last year where we brought in what we called influencers and young people that were trying to impact the news and they had no clue about what we what we're up against.

They don't even believe that they need to save the press. We may not need to save it as it is, but we are essential to democracy and we can't let people forget that. And they think that as long as they work for a nonprofit or they give to the community, that they're doing their job. It's not enough. We have to save journalists that are willing to go out there and stake the ground and find out what's going on and report on those issues. So that's all I can say.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Thank you, Brian. He didn't shout out his paper, but it's Brian Townsend with The Precinct Reporter. Thank you. Okay. Hi.



JULIA POWLES, UCLA

Hi. My name is Julia Powles. I'm an Australian law professor. I'm here because I've just been appointed at UCLA and I'm a former journalist at The Guardian newspaper, where I wrote on tech and capture. And that's why I'm here because I think and I want to really make a comment to internationalism. Both, I've spent the last few months I've been in places like Indonesia, India, Taiwan and Hong Kong and the first is many people outside the U.S. see that what is happening here is what has been happening elsewhere and they have tactics and they have organized and they have experience that I think is just immensely inspiring and gives a road map for how to work.

So, there's a lot of humility I think you can bring into the international arena and there's also some swagger, and countries like Australia have done really pioneering things around journalism and tech and regulation. Some of it I've been very critical of. But they want to ally and they will back people who are brave and who are taking their public role seriously, whether in the media or in the government. And I think using those international alliances, there's so many of them from international organizations to bilateral and multilateral collaborations, and people around the world are watching and they know that what they read is not the whole picture, and they will build through the various networks that we have, like the networks that have brought me here, to really bring solidarity to people who are trying to act locally.

So, I just want to really know that you are from a much broader place than this place and I see L.A. as really a connecting place. So, there are people who want to join and can do a lot of work to build up people here, and there's a lot of really powerful progressive work I think that's happened in press and platforms, some of which has been led actually out of UCLA that's very exciting and could be very world-leading I think on some of the regulatory models particularly. I mean, let's tax these tech companies properly and there's a whole bunch of countries that can do that not just this one, so, it's really a vote for internationalism. Any ideas that don't fly here, they can fly elsewhere. So, keep putting the word out. Thank you.

RACHEL STILWELL, ATTORNEY

Hi, Rachel Stillwell again. This is for Congressman Ruiz. So, as somebody who has watched livestreams of House Energy and Commerce and the Subcommittee on Communications, and that's the committee you're on, right? Okay. So, they're really hard to watch.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

I agree, he said.



RACHEL STILWELL, ATTORNEY

So, you know, there's a little less than half of the people in the room, then I'm like, okay, yeah, right on. And then, you know, you'll hear from the other folks and it's really performative and making up issues out of whole cloth and not addressing, you know, substance and all of that. But you know, but as somebody that is trying to work before the FCC, once in a while you'll see something in a docket where Salem Communications will have something to say about how they're like strange bedfellows and agreeing with us on a couple things, right? Because it's self-interested for them.

They did a letter from Hugh Hewitt, who's a conservative host, right, in one of their filings. Anyway, I kind of have two observations or questions. One is when the Democrats don't have the majority, like how does House Oversight work with the FCC? What power really is there and could there be? But the other is, you know, scratching your head saying, "Are there any people on these committees or subcommittees that are not Democrats that will listen to substantive policy questions as it relates to media and communications/ I don't see them, but I also know that sometimes they're just talking because they're performing for the administration." And I'd love to find out if there's any real there at all that could be exploited.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Thank you, Rachel. I'm going to give folks a minute to come up to the mic and if I don't see anyone making moves, we're going to move to hear directly from the Congressman and then the Commissioner with their reflections on what's been shared here today. Okay, I see Arturo making moves.

ARTURO CARMONA, LATINO MEDIA COLLABORATIVE

The only thing I wanted to add, and thank you Jessica for putting this great event together. I'm the president of the Latino Media Collaborative, Arturo Carmona. You've heard from a couple of our board members, Gabriel Lerner and Efrain, and also Jessica's part of our board. This administration, the efforts to silence is having a chilling effect on Latino media. I'm hearing it from executives. I'm hearing it from reporters, so there's no question about it.

My question is the organizing piece. We're going to take the pledge. We're on board, but how do we combat that very powerful chilling effect that it's having, especially on the mid- and larger networks? We represent about 170 outlets across the Southwest. We're a growing operation of media entities and advocates trying to elevate and strengthen Latino media in the Southwest part of our nation. And so, how do we organize, how do we develop an inside-outside strategy? How do we utilize organizations like mine as an intermediate organization to provide that buffer? As I've heard people talk, how do we crack



this nut? We got to figure it out. We don't have an option. We have to engage. We have to fight. But, how do we also protect those outlets that have to protect, you know, their employees and their businesses? It's a real fact. And so, I think there's ways and there's strategies for us to get around it. I don't think those entities are going to be at the forefront.

So, we have to figure out solutions from an organizing standpoint. And so, I just wanted to put that out there. There's no questions, at least with many outlets in our network, that this is having a very powerful chilling effect. So, how do we overcome that? And so, I'm just here to raise my hand to take this pledge and to figure out how we fight together. So, that's it.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Thank you, Arturo, for those comments and for plugging the pledge which is up on the screen. I'm gonna give like 10 more seconds. If I see someone making moves, we'll take another one. Reminder to folks who are livestreaming with us that there the pledge is up. You can take that and that's an opportunity for you to share feedback that we can pass along to the folks here as well. Great. So with that, I'm going to turn it over to the Congressman to share reflections on what you've heard today and what you've been thinking about in this realm.

REP. RAUL RUIZ

Sure. Thank you. Thank you so much. I'm Congressman Dr. Raul Ruiz. I'm an emergency medicine physician. I represent California's 25th district, which is eastern Riverside County, all of the Imperial County and the eastern portion of San Bernardino County. So, it's a pretty large district.

I'm from the district. I grew up in Coachella. My parents were farmworkers. I lived in a trailer growing up until my dad was promoted to work in a packing house in Thermal and then we moved into our home in the barrio of Coachella, where my mother still lives and my older brother was the first to graduate from high school. I followed and wanted to be a doctor since I was four years old and come back and serve the community and I did after going to UCLA and then a school in Boston for many years and then I came back home. A school that I'm very proud of right now as has been mentioned, Harvard for standing up to this Trump administration and I sit on the Energy and Commerce Committee and I sit on the Communications and Technology subcommittee.

So, we've talked about freedom of speech. We've talked about Section 230 for over eight years now. And when Republicans are in the majority, previously they would bring in Zuckerberg and and all these other tech giants and they would berate them and they would accuse them of having a liberal bias and they would want to impose certain restrictions on their ability to report. And now that it's flipped and we can see that these tech giants are now bending the knee to Donald Trump and his and his desires, they're



silent. They're silent. One of the things I've learned since being in Congress is that they have no real ideological platform that is consistent. They only have the goal of having power. And if it leads them to power, then they'll support it. And if they don't, if it doesn't, they won't support it.

And so that's that's the one consistency that I've seen there in my 13 years in Congress. And I'm here because I'm a fan of Commissioner Gomez. We've had multiple conversations. We've had conversations about the problems of disinformation, from anywhere from the political arena to the pandemic arena and the dangers of that disinformation. And I applaud her courage in taking this First Amendment Tour across the country because nowadays being in the administration, being in public office and taking the stand can put your life at risk. And I say that with absolute certainty and confidence because I've seen it not just in members of Congress and Republicans who oppose Trump but I've seen it in witnesses that come in that if there's a tweet against them or a Truth Social against them, they get they get barraged with hundreds of death threats from that whole other side of intimidation that authoritarian governments thrive on. And I want to thank the Free Press for being here.

I want to introduce Ariana Orne, who's my communications director, flew out because she was very excited about this event. She flew out from D.C. and she's getting to know a lot of journalists here in the L.A. media market as well during this trip. So, please reach out and connect with her after this event. But there's several things that we put together here to address. One is the roll back of Net Neutrality. Two is the content moderation and three is the changing in the media ownership rules. And all of those really go towards manipulation and bias and against the independence of a free press. It's putting out there what you want to put out there for either corporate interests or for political interests. And right now we are talking about, you know, diversity and youth access and making sure that that people are reflected.

The fight is at a much higher level right now. This fight is at survival of the free press. The fight is at the independence of journalists. The fight is also for what Commissioner Gomez says, which is the pillar of our democracy. You in the press and journalists are an important check on power. And when you're attacked, it is meant to allow the powerful and the corrupt to go without sunshine and transparency and to fool the American people.

The other thing that's at a very high level is what is truth? It's not even agreeing on the facts. And if we are not functioning within the same reality, then how can we start an argument? How can we convince each other of right and wrong? How can we believe in even what we see? And when you have a President who says, "Don't believe what you see, only believe what I tell you." Or says that anybody who opposes him in the press, the press is the enemy of the people, then that distorts that reality when you have as we've seen during the pandemic a lot of bizarre claims that have been going mainstream and even you have members of Congress who subscribe to these claims and push them out, like Marjorie



Taylor Greene and others, then what is reality to us? And how can we begin to have a debate on how can we begin to create policy on problems when we can't agree on what reality is and what the truth is?

And in that environment, dictatorships thrive. In that environment, authoritarianism thrives. In that environment, you see the fall of democracy because democratic institutions are supposed to allow a free people to get the information to make the decisions themselves on who to vote on what to vote on. And when you completely blur the picture of reality, then what the hell are we going to do with our democracy? So these are serious conversations that we're having in Congress as a Democratic Party and how we're having to understand the current state of the information ecosystem.

And I got to tell you that a lot of people, maybe the majority of people, don't get their news from TV or newspaper, print or even radio anymore. You know, when we studied the people that voted, and we asked them, "Where do you get your primary source of information?" The traditional source of news comes from TV. Whether you watch Fox News or CNN or MSNBC or News Nation or newspaper, whether you read The Wall Street Journal or The New York Times or radio shows, of the people that said we get our news from the traditional sources, Kamala Harris won. She won. She invested, she spoke, she was in interviews, she went out there, she did her commercials.

But of the people that say they get their primary news from influencers who have no training in journalism or podcasts, right, or social media, these 30-second clips of what's happening in the world today, Donald Trump won. And now it seems like more and more people are getting their news from those alternative methods. So, it's no coincidence why the White House press corps is changing. They're inviting influencers. They're communicating with Joe Rogan. They're communicating with and building an influencer group. And by the way, paying a lot of conservative organizations are paying influencers a half a million a year just to put out conservative ideology with, you know, their millions of followers.

And liberals are way behind the eight ball here. They dominate that information ecosystem. So, we have to figure out, okay how do we incorporate those mechanisms with journalism? How do we incorporate and reach the youth who are primarily looking at social media? How do we bring them in? How do we influence the influencers to be fair and honest and independent? Right? How do you even begin to do that?

And I'll give you an example. You know, when Kamala Harris did her interview with Fox News, she had about 7 million in viewership, and that seems like a pretty decent size for an interview, on a national news source, especially since it was going to be contentious. Well, when President Trump did his hour-and-a-half on Joe Rogan, he had 47 million views. So, I think, you know, that's another conversation that we need to have in terms of what do we do with the judicial system? That is our biggest fear, right?



Because the judicial system doesn't have a way to enforce their rules. They rely on the Department of Justice. But when you're seeing the Department of Justice aligned with President Trump basically, you know, not an independent organization, then we're very concerned that he would dismiss those. Now, one of the things that's holding him back is the fact that polls are showing that 80% of the American people would highly disapprove of President Trump not following the orders of the Supreme Court. And they're playing they're using word play to determine they did and they didn't and they're trying to confuse the situation, whether regarding the deportations to El Salvador but at least there's been a lot of rulings that have paused or unfrozen funding or paused any actions from these executive orders that they they have abided by. But that is something that we'll be very vigilant on.

And in terms of being in the minority and how do we provide oversight, that's one of the difficulties of being in the minority because we don't have the gavel. The chair of that committee determines what the agenda is, determines what the oversight and investigation platform is going to be. And so as a member of the minority party in that committee, when they invite a guest, then we can ask them questions. We can't determine who comes. We can't subpoena the government, but the good news is that once we win back the House, let me knock on wood, we'll have that power throughout all of government and we will use the subpoena power. We will bring them in and we will ask these tough questions, and it very well might be that I will be the chair of the Oversight and Investigation Committee next Congress.

And the erosion of the free press is something that I'm very concerned about because it is an existential threat to our democracy and our Constitution. And so that's something that, you know, we will be looking into. and in terms of solidarity and partnerships, you know, it's going to require all of us thinking innovatively. It's going to require us to communicate. It's what you guys do best is to be thought-provoking, is to create the doubt of President Trump and the MAGA and what their intentions are and to highlight those and be bold and be upfront and call it how you see it. That's what we're doing in Congress.

And we've been doing a lot more face-to-camera on our social media because we've learned from this past election, in order to really put what's really happening in Congress and what's really in all of these different atrocious bills that they're moving through. I hope that addressed a lot of the things that were said here and some of the concerns that I have and I'm, you know, very thankful to have been invited. Thank you. And I'm a big fan of Commissioner Gomez. I think she's going to create the shock waves within this space to really bring attention to what's happening and and and we need to translate that attention into action.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS



Thank you. I'm gonna turn it over to Commissioner Gomez. I want to acknowledge we're running a bit long, but this is too interesting and too important to interrupt. So, we're just going to go a few minutes long here. And thank you all for bearing with me.

I want to really underscore something you said because that's the million-dollar question that we didn't have when I was in law school is what happens when the President blows off the Judiciary because we came to understand separation of powers and that was how we had checks and balances. We have the fourth estate, we have Congress, we have the Executive Branch and the Judiciary. We didn't even contemplate the Executive Branch ignoring or refusing to enforce the Judiciary. But what you said is super-interesting. Yeah. It's that a survey found that 80% of Americans across the ideological spectrum don't like that. And so it's why I'm going to plug the pledge and plug organizing.

The difference between us and Hungary and the Philippines and Poland is that our civil society infrastructure is way more robust and it's way stronger. It's why they're coming after the nonprofit sector as Efrain was speaking to earlier. They're coming after us because we are the bulwark against fascism. And so it's important sometimes I've heard so many people talk about feeling hopeless and I understand why. But that to me gives me power that when 80% of Americans stand up and say enough, that that is a check on the power and that's why we have to continue to advocate, to organize and to report the truth and push through this really hard moment. I couldn't, I'm here to moderate.

No one's here to hear me speak, but I really just wanted to pull that thread because Free Press is an advocacy organization. We have 1.4 million members across the country. And sometimes it's important for us to hear that when you make calls to Congress or when you sign a pledge that the FCC receives, that it actually means something. So, I want to come back to you, Commissioner, because you made the trek across the country to hear from Angelenos. You're leading the charge here to protect free speech because you believe it's critical to democracy. Can you share with us what you're absorbing here from the room?

FCC COMMISSIONER ANNA GOMEZ

Yeah. Well, thank you and thank you, Congressman Dr. Ruiz. I really appreciate our conversations and your support. We really do enjoy talking to each other and working together. One of the top things that I take away from this is first of all I was so touched by hearing the remarks today both from my fellow panelists as well as from people who spoke today. I heard you're tired. It's a little early to be tired. So, let's hope that we get inspired and are lifted up by each other as we work to protect our precious democracy that can be very fragile but also very strong because we are strong.



One thing that I like to point out is this administration has so much power right now. And yet this censorship and control comes from a position of fear. It's fear of any dissent or anyone speaking against them. And that weakness should be evident to us. So, when they instill so much fear in us that there's going to be retribution, that there's going to be retaliation, we have to remember that what they are coming from is a position of actually weakness because dissent should actually make us stronger as a country. We may not like hearing it.

I don't like it when people disagree with me, but I also know that having a diversity of views and a diversity of skills actually makes me stronger and makes our country stronger. So that's very important. Journalism that meets journalistic standards is so important to our country today. It's important for fact-checking. It's important to combat mis- and disinformation to import and to to fight malinformation.

It's also so important for civic engagement. We heard about news deserts and we heard about the effect that they have on what people view as what's important to them. And that ties then into Section 230 and content moderation and the fact that we have so much rampant mis- and disinformation, which once again brings us back to why journalism is so very important.

So, we want to make sure that we are protecting the free press and a free and independent media. whether it's by supporting local broadcasters, by supporting public broadcasting, by supporting newspapers and publishers because they are what we need to provide us information for important community news and civic engagement. I liked the message from Brian Townsend that was, we need to develop other champions because that is the point of this First Amendment Tour is to draw attention to this issue and then hopefully to encourage others to speak up and to push back. So, I thought that was very, very good.

I hear the concerns about social media and the news and the fact that there's a large portion of our population, especially the youth that get their news from non-journalistic sources. And I don't know how to address that issue. It's outside of our jurisdiction. But I will tell you about one social media influencer that I met at Maryland Public Television. We were doing an event on mis- and disinformation online and the importance of educating the youth on how to ensure to have the tools to ensure that what they are seeing is in fact fact-based to to know when to push back. And it was moderated by a young woman who has hundreds of thousands of followers and what she does is she reads the news headlines every day. And that's an interesting way, and she started doing it just because she was interested and she was in college and then now she's an influencer and she makes money off of it.

So, that gives me hope that there are in fact ways to break through and to make sure that people are getting good fact-based journalism that meets journalistic standards. So bottom line, I'm so inspired by



everything I heard today. I really appreciate Free Press for putting this together, and I hope that you will continue to speak up and speak out.

And oh, one last thing, the buffer issue I thought that was a very interesting issue. There is so much fear right now about retribution that we are hearing about and there's definitely a chilling effect which is why organizations can be very good advocates on behalf of individuals that may themselves fear some kind of retribution. So I thought that was also a really interesting comment. I can't remember who said it. It was Arturo? Was that you?

ARTURO CARMONA, LATINO MEDIA COLLABORATIVE

Yes.

FCC COMMISSIONER ANNA GOMEZ

Yes. Okay. So that was very interesting. So again, sorry, I know I'm rambling, but I was trying to take notes. and thank you again. I thought everyone had great comments and today was really a very special special event. So, thank you.

JESSICA J. GONZÁLEZ, FREE PRESS

Thank you both for being here. Thank you to our panelists and thank you to everyone who showed up in person. We got people in L.A. to drive to a place, y'all. You have no idea what a big deal that is. And thank you to everyone on the livestream. On behalf of Free Press, I want to thank you for this conversation, to encourage you to take the pledge against government censorship and control, and to stay tuned with us at freepress.net for more important events, news, and information on how we're holding the administration accountable. Thank you all.

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