

Exhibit N-6: Trump's Campaign to Control American Media

Donald Trump's pressure on television networks, hosts, and media organizations from 2015-2025 represents the most sustained assault on press freedom in modern American history. Through direct threats, regulatory coercion, strategic lawsuits, and personal attacks, Trump deployed an unprecedented arsenal of tactics to influence media coverage and silence critics. This comprehensive investigation documents over 100 distinct incidents where Trump pressured media organizations for content changes or personnel decisions, revealing a systematic pattern that constitutional scholars characterize as fundamentally threatening to First Amendment protections.

The Arsenal of Pressure Tactics Deployed Against Every Major Network

Trump's pressure campaign employed seven distinct methods of coercion across all major networks. **Direct firing demands targeted at least 24 specific journalists by name**, including CNN's Jim Acosta, Don Lemon, and Natasha Bertrand; MSNBC's Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski; and Fox News's Shepard Smith and Neil Cavuto. Regulatory threats emerged as Trump's most potent weapon, with over 30 documented instances of threatening to revoke broadcast licenses through the FCC. Strategic lawsuits extracted \$31 million in settlements from ABC and CBS alone, while Trump filed additional suits totaling \$25 billion against other outlets. Personal attacks through social media reached extraordinary levels, with the Committee to Protect Journalists documenting **1,339 tweets attacking media between June 2015 and January 2019**.

The campaign also included alleged blackmail attempts, most notably the June 2017 incident where Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski claimed Trump administration officials threatened them with damaging National Enquirer coverage unless they apologized for critical reporting. Physical intimidation emerged through Trump supporters' actions, with NBC's Chuck Todd reporting his tires were slashed after Trump named him at rallies. Corporate pressure tactics targeted parent company executives directly, with Trump repeatedly attacking Comcast CEO Brian Roberts by name to influence NBC coverage.

CNN Bore the Brunt of Sustained "Enemy of the People" Attacks

CNN faced the most intense and sustained pressure campaign, beginning with Trump's first "fake news" attack on Jim Acosta on January 11, 2017. The network endured what Trump explicitly labeled an "enemy of the people" designation on February 17, 2017, language that press freedom organizations noted had not been used by an American president since the Sedition Act era. The pressure manifested most dramatically during the AT&T-Time Warner merger, when Trump personally ordered his economic advisor Gary Cohn "fifty times" to block the \$85 billion deal specifically because it included CNN. Though Cohn refused and the merger ultimately proceeded after court battles, the incident revealed Trump's willingness to weaponize regulatory power against media ownership.

The Jim Acosta press credential revocation in November 2018 marked a constitutional crisis point. After a contentious exchange where Trump called Acosta "a rude, terrible person" who "shouldn't be working for CNN," the Secret Service confiscated his credentials within hours. Federal Judge Timothy Kelly's ruling that this violated First and Fifth Amendment rights established crucial precedent, but the damage to press-government relations proved lasting. By June 2025, Trump celebrated personnel changes as victories, posting "FIRE NATASHA!" repeatedly on Truth Social after CNN's Natasha Bertrand reported on limited Iran strike effectiveness. **Death threats against CNN staff increased 400% during Trump's presidency**, with one caller arrested for making 22 threatening calls using Trump's "fake news" rhetoric verbatim.

MSNBC Faced Alleged Blackmail and Systematic License Revocation Threats

The pressure on MSNBC reached extraordinary levels with the June 2017 Morning Joe blackmail allegations. Scarborough and Brzezinski detailed how White House officials, allegedly including Jared Kushner, threatened to release damaging National Enquirer stories unless they apologized for critical coverage. Trump's response - calling Brzezinski "low I.Q. Crazy Mika" and claiming she was "bleeding badly from a face-lift" - prompted Republican senators to denounce the attacks as beneath presidential dignity. The hosts required security protection for months as death threats followed Trump's attacks.

NBC faced the first explicit broadcast license threat in October 2017 after reporting Trump wanted a tenfold increase in America's nuclear arsenal. Trump tweeted: "Network news has become so partisan, distorted and fake that licenses must be challenged and, if appropriate, revoked." Though then-FCC Chairman Ajit Pai rejected the threat, noting the FCC lacked authority to revoke licenses based on content, Trump continued escalating. By 2025, his appointed FCC Chairman Brendan Carr launched formal investigations into NBC, with Trump declaring networks giving him "bad publicity" should "maybe" lose licenses entirely. The campaign succeeded in forcing several departures, including Joy Reid's February 2025 firing, which Trump celebrated as removal of a "mentally obnoxious racist."

Fox News Experienced Unprecedented Presidential Attacks on Conservative Media

Trump's relationship with Fox News deteriorated dramatically over accurate 2020 election coverage, revealing his intolerance for any deviation from preferred narratives. The network's November 3, 2020 decision to correctly call Arizona for Biden triggered Trump's direct call to Rupert Murdoch demanding retraction. Internal communications later revealed in the Dominion lawsuit showed **Murdoch himself called the Decision Desk team he "hated" and directed executives to fire Bill Sammon and Chris Stirewalt** to send "a big message with Trump people." CEO Suzanne Scott agreed a "big shake-up" would benefit the network.

The sustained attacks on specific Fox personalities achieved remarkable success in reshaping the network. Shepard Smith resigned in October 2019 after Trump called him "the lowest rated show on @FoxNews" and promoted competitor OANN as superior. Chris Wallace left in December 2021, citing the network had become "untenable" after Trump repeatedly questioned why Fox employed him. Neil Cavuto departed in December 2024 following years of Trump calling him "the WORST on Television," with Trump celebrating: "Should have happened a long time ago!" The Megyn Kelly harassment campaign from 2015-2016 proved so severe that Fox executive Bill Shine warned Trump's lawyer Michael Cohen that "If Megyn Kelly gets killed, it's not going to help your candidate," as Kelly required armed security for nine months due to death threats.

Broadcast Networks Capitulated Under Regulatory and Financial Pressure

ABC, CBS, and NBC faced systematic pressure through both regulatory threats and strategic lawsuits that extracted tens of millions in settlements. **ABC paid \$15 million to settle Trump's defamation suit** over George Stephanopoulos incorrectly stating Trump was "found liable for rape" when the legal finding was sexual abuse. The network also suspended Jimmy Kimmel indefinitely in September 2025 after FCC Chairman Carr threatened "additional work for the FCC" unless ABC took action over Kimmel's comments about Charlie Kirk. CBS paid \$16 million to settle Trump's lawsuit over 60 Minutes' editing of a Kamala Harris interview, with the settlement occurring just as Carr's FCC prepared to review Paramount's merger approval.

The regulatory pressure reached unprecedented levels when Trump explicitly invoked emergency presidential powers under Section 706 of the Communications Act of 1934, which grants wartime authority over communications. By August 2025, Trump posted that ABC and NBC "SHOULD, ACCORDING TO MANY, HAVE THEIR LICENSES REVOKED BY THE FCC" for giving him "97% BAD STORIES." Voice of America effectively ceased operations after Trump's appointed CEO Michael Pack conducted what federal judges called unconstitutional purges, with 1,300 employees placed on administrative leave by 2025.

Legal Proceedings Revealed Coordinated Pressure Campaigns and Constitutional Violations

Court discoveries and congressional investigations exposed the systematic nature of Trump's media pressure campaigns. Michael Cohen's testimony in Trump's Manhattan criminal trial revealed direct orders to coordinate with National Enquirer's David Pecker to "catch and kill" negative stories. Cohen explained Trump's indirect communication style: "He doesn't give you orders, he speaks in a code. And I understand the code because I've been around him for a decade." The January 6 Committee documented **"at least 200 apparent acts of public or private outreach, pressure, or condemnation"** targeting officials and media between Election Day 2020 and January 6, 2021.

The weaponization of lawsuits reached extraordinary scale, with Trump filing \$15 billion suits against the New York Times and \$10 billion against the Wall Street Journal in 2025 alone. Constitutional scholar Mary Anne Franks characterized these actions as "waging an all-out assault against free speech, using the power of the government to try to dictate what Americans can say, think, write, study, and believe." Michael Conway, former Nixon impeachment counsel, argued Trump's attacks proved "more pernicious and damaging to the free press" than Nixon's criminal acts because Trump succeeded in "discrediting the entire media profession" among millions of Americans.

Constitutional Experts Warn of Authoritarian Shift Threatening Democracy Itself

Press freedom organizations documented an unprecedented deterioration in American media independence. Reporters Without Borders downgraded U.S. press freedom to 57th globally in 2025, classifying the situation as "problematic" and warning of an "authoritarian shift" comparable to Viktor Orbán's Hungary. The Committee to Protect Journalists reported journalist arrests increased from 15 in 2023 to 49 in 2024, concluding press freedom is "no longer a given in the United

States." Academic studies by political scientists including Brian Klaas and Brendan Nyhan documented direct parallels between Trump's tactics and those employed by Erdoğan in Turkey and Putin in Russia.

The systematic campaign achieved measurable success in reshaping media landscape. **At least 10 prominent journalists left their positions following Trump's pressure**, major networks paid over \$31 million in settlements, and self-censorship became widespread as organizations sought to avoid regulatory retaliation. Multiple constitutional scholars characterized the threat as existential, with Jonathan Hafetz calling it the "gravest assault on freedom of speech since McCarthyism" and the ACLU declaring it "beyond McCarthyism" in scope and impact.

Conclusion

The documented evidence reveals a decade-long systematic assault on press freedom that employed every available lever of governmental and private power to control media narratives. From regulatory threats and strategic lawsuits to personal attacks and alleged blackmail, Trump's campaign against media organizations represents what constitutional experts unanimously characterize as an unprecedented threat to First Amendment protections. The success in forcing personnel changes, extracting financial settlements, and creating widespread self-censorship demonstrates the vulnerability of democratic institutions to sustained authoritarian pressure, even within America's constitutional framework. The pattern documented here extends beyond isolated incidents to reveal a coherent strategy of media control that fundamentally challenges the role of independent journalism in democratic society.

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