



Statement for the Record of

Human Rights First

On

U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary

“Europe’s Threat to American Speech and Innovation: Part II”

February 4, 2026

I. About Human Rights First

Established in 1978, Human Rights First is an independent, non-profit organization that for more than four decades has pressed the United States to take a leading role in promoting and defending human rights. The organization's work includes advocacy and action to challenge authoritarianism, systemic injustice, and existential threats to our communities and our democracy, including the attacks on our constitutional rights.

II. Overview

Human Rights First is alarmed by this administration's continued attacks on First Amendment rights, including the [arrests and suppression](#) of journalists, the threats lobbied at [students, faculty, universities](#), and [public education](#) writ large, the [targeting of elected](#) officials, and attempts to [criminalize nonprofit](#) organizations for their constitutionally protected speech. Equally concerning are attempts by some lawmakers and elected officials to ignore this clear pattern of eroding Constitutional protections and instead unscrupulously divert attention to regulatory practices in other countries. This hearing is an example of just that—focused on European online information regulations that some lawmakers claim amount to censorship—it is a blatant attempt to distract from the real threat to the First Amendment posed by the Trump administration.

These regulations in Europe and the United Kingdom, like the European Union's (EU) [Digital Services Act](#) (DSA) and the United Kingdom's (UK) [Online Safety Act](#) (OSA) are not censorship laws as some Members of Congress have claimed, but are designed to protect internet users against harmful content, such as defamatory speech, online scams, and to create guardrails to shield children from adult content. This hearing is an attempt to deflect attention from the unconstitutional policies and actions happening here in the United States under this administration.

III. Crackdown on Campus Free Speech

The Trump administration has targeted the First Amendment rights of students, faculty, and threatened Universities with legal and financial harm unless they turn compliant to this administration's political goals. Visa cancellations, policy reversals, and increased scrutiny of international students are creating an environment of fear and instability. These actions not only disrupt educational pathways but also undermine free speech on campuses. On September 30,

2025 a federal court ruled in a [landmark decision](#) that the Trump administration, as part of a broad assault on civil rights, violated the First Amendment in carrying out a policy of arresting, detaining, and deporting noncitizen students and faculty members for ideological reasons. Similarly, this administration has [threatened universities](#) through lawsuits and cut or threatened to cut billions of dollars in funding in response to real or perceived policy stances.

IV. Arrests of and Assaults Against Journalists, Attacks on the Press

In the first month of 2026 alone, there have been several notable attacks on journalists; many of which occurred in relation to their coverage of protests. For instance, former CNN anchor Don Lemon was [arrested in Beverly Hills](#), California on January 29th for his coverage of a protest at the Cities Church in Minnesota. Several other journalists who covered the protest were also arrested, including independent [journalist Georgia Fort](#), a member of the [National Association of Black Journalists](#). Just days prior a [federal magistrate judge rejected](#) five arrest warrants for individuals present at the protest, including Lemon. These shocking arrests come just weeks after Washington Post journalist Hannah Natanson's home was [raided](#) by federal agents executing a search warrant. Though the government is barred from searching the items while litigation is ongoing, the government's brazen infiltration into a journalist's information and sources could create a chilling effect wherein sources are less likely to come forward about abuses of power or illegal actions by government officials.

In addition to the attacks on journalists, this administration has also targeted media personalities and television networks for airing programming they disagreed with. In September 2025, TV Personality Jimmy Kimmel was [briefly suspended](#) from his long-running late night show after comments he made about the murder of Charlie Kirk upset officials in the administration. This suspension by his network ABC came after threats from the Federal Communication Commission Chair Brendan Carr to take action against the network if they did not remove Kimmel. Arresting journalists for covering events and attempting to control media commentary are clear violations of our First Amendment rights to free speech and a free press; moreover, these actions are hallmarks of democratic backsliding and authoritarianism.

V. Targeting of Elected Officials

This administration has also gone after elected officials for their free speech. Senator Mark Kelly and other lawmakers released a video reiterating service members' right to refuse unlawful

orders. The administration characterized this video as [seditious and took action](#) against Kelly – a retired Navy Captain – by censuring him, an action that would result in a reduction in his rank and retirement pay. The administration and Department of Justice are also investigating the other lawmakers who participated in the video, including Senator Elissa Slotkin, Representative Jason Crow, Representative Chrissy Houlahan, Representative Chris Deluzio, and Representative Maggie Goodlander. Similar to the improper arrests of journalists and activists, these political attacks against Members of Congress intend to sow fear and dissuade lawmakers and everyday Americans from speaking freely.

VII. The Real Free Speech Crisis

The Trump administration has targeted student protestors, attempted to muzzle academic institutions by [cutting funding](#) to universities who refused to capitulate to the administration’s demands, and labeled nonprofits and civil society members as “domestic terrorists.” Meanwhile, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Border Patrol (BP) forces continue their brutal and devastating tactics in United States cities, including the use of violent force and [crowd control weapons](#) against peaceful protestors and journalists — a clear violation of the First Amendment.

For months, communities across the country have been terrorized by ICE and Border Patrol agents carrying out [massive raids](#) – disappearing mothers, co-workers, and neighbors, [kidnapping children](#) and families, sending them to remote detention sites, both [here](#) and [abroad](#), with well-documented cases of poor conditions and rights violations. Two individuals observing the actions of federal agents – [Renee Nicole Good](#) and [Alex Pretti](#) were killed in Minneapolis last month by federal agents. If citizens, journalists, activists, and civil society cannot critique or protest government actions without fear of retaliation, abuse, or even death, our democracy will cease to function, and our country will become unrecognizable. This administration’s [broadscale](#) attack on free speech and dissent is the greatest threat to our First Amendment rights and to our democracy writ large. Congress must take action to reaffirm the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and curtail authoritarian overreach.

VIII. Recommendations

1. Pass the No Political Enemies Act (NOPE) H.R. 7060 - to prevent federal agencies from misusing investigations, prosecutions, or regulatory actions to target individuals or organizations for their protected political speech or associations.
2. Provide a civil remedy for any individual whose rights have been violated by an officer or agent of U.S. Customs and Border Protection or U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.
3. Demand that any funding for the Department of Homeland Security include oversight and accountability measures to prevent abuse by federal immigration officers and create mechanisms to hold federal agents to account for abuses and violations of the law during enforcement operations.
4. Hold the administration accountable for its continued attacks on free speech and the First Amendment and ensure journalists, students, activists, nonprofits and others are not wrongfully targeted for protected speech.