

## Judge Presses Trump Administration Over Voice of America Shutdown

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A court battle is underway following the Trump administration's directive to suspend most Voice of America (VOA) operations, sidelining hundreds of journalists and halting programming. The decision has raised constitutional questions and drawn criticism from press freedom groups.

President Donald Trump signed an executive order in March 2025 directing the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM), which oversees VOA, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Radio Free Asia, to reduce operations to the minimum required by law. As a result, nearly all VOA employees, around 1,300 people, were placed on administrative leave, and foreign contractors were told their roles would end by March 31.

Michael Abramowitz, VOA's director, described the halt in services as unprecedented, stating it was the first time in the outlet's 83-year history that its broadcasts had ceased. For decades, VOA has served as a key part of U.S. outreach abroad, offering objective news in dozens of languages to audiences in restrictive media environments.

The shutdown prompted legal action from a coalition of journalists and free press advocates, who argue the executive order violates the First Amendment and improperly bypasses congressional authority. Judges in New York and Washington, D.C., temporarily blocked aspects of the shutdown and ordered services to be restored pending further review.

U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth recently criticized the administration for not complying with those orders and requested an explanation on why \$260 million in allocated funding has not been used to resume operations. The judge warned that continued inaction could amount to a misuse of federal funds.

Journalists impacted by the shutdown, including VOA's White House bureau chief Patsy Widakuswara and national correspondent Steve Herman, have warned of broader implications. Herman called the move a "national security issue," expressing concern that America's global

presence is being weakened, especially in countries with limited access to independent news.

Press freedom organizations such as Reporters Without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalists have denounced the shutdown, saying it undermines U.S. leadership in defending democratic values through independent journalism.

The legal case underscores the tension between reducing the size of federal agencies and preserving institutions that promote free speech abroad. With court deadlines approaching, the administration's next steps could have long-lasting consequences for American soft power and the credibility of publicly funded journalism.