



**Senator Peter Welch
Remarks as Delivered
on President Trump's Attacks on the First Amendment
March 25, 2025**

Mr. President, as you know, in 1791, our nation's founders had the boldness to ratify the First Amendment to the Constitution. At the time, it was an extremely radical concept—protecting our fundamental individual freedoms to religion, to speech, to assembly, to the right to petition the government, and to have a free press that would operate without fear or government censorship.

The First Amendment deeply reflects our new nation's view that we [can] have a society where individuals can freely voice their views, participate in civic life, and hold our political leaders accountable. And these five guaranteed liberties are part of what makes us a free and democratic society.

Mr. President, I believe that all of the members of the U.S. Senate share the commitment to the First Amendment. But there's extreme divisions among us about what that means.

Let me explain where I do believe, right now, there is a significant assault on the First Amendment. President Trump has sought to silence or to punish journalists who report negatively on him. This is not about a President, because Democratic and Republican Presidents have been critical of journalists.

But he's taking it to an entirely unprecedented level—banning the Associated Press from parts of the White House Press Pool because they don't use his own personal preferred name for the Gulf of Mexico. He's controlling the viewpoint of the Associated Press. And they're not relenting. He's called—in his speeches at the Department of Justice—President Trump said that the press that reports on him negatively should be, and this was his word: 'illegal.'

At the FCC, the Chairman has opened investigations into press organizations that it doesn't like—PBS and NPR. That's not an investigation that was opened on the basis of a determination by the full commission—in fact, two members have been fired—but on the political preferences of the Trump Administration. And, of course, we've had lawsuits against the press when the President did not like a report of a poll that was printed in a newspaper in Iowa.

I'm very concerned about attacks on the freedom of speech. We've had Executive Orders that target law firms because the President did not like some members of that law firm and who they represented.

And the President has issued Executive Orders punishing firms that represent his political opponents and who are—in his opinion—were involved in litigation against him when he was a private citizen. This is not an investigation based upon—this is not actually an assault based upon an investigation. It's an attack that's based upon the personal annoyance of the President himself.

We're seeing in the Trump Administration arresting students who are in the country legally—they're here *legally*—and they're arrested not because they committed a crime but because they took a viewpoint that the President disagreed with.

And we've even seen the censoring of words that the Administration doesn't like, and there's a whole list of words that cannot be used. And, of course, one of the incredibly petty examples that shows how extreme this is, and how wanton it is, was removing references to the Enola Gay from the Department of Defense websites because it included the word 'gay.'

This is a very important inflection point in our democracy. The First Amendment is being challenged by the executive who's unravelling the protections that have been absolute through thick and thin. We all in this chamber have to stand up for the First Amendment. And we can have disagreements on the speech that we agree with and that we disagree with, vehemently.

But our obligation, as a separate branch of government, as members of the U.S. Senate, is to defend the rights of people to have free speech—whether they agree with our political position or they don't.

So, all of us, Mr. President, must defend to our core the constitutional rights so essential to the well-being of our democracy—the freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom to petition government, and of course, the freedom of the press.

Mr. President, I yield back.

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