

Trump announces plan to close Kennedy Center for 2 years coinciding with July Fourth celebrations

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President Donald Trump's abrupt announcement February 1 that the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts will shut its doors for "approximately" two years beginning July 4 has triggered shock and anger throughout Washington's artistic community.

The declaration, made characteristically via social media before any formal plan was presented to staff or the public, proclaimed a project of "Construction, Revitalization, and Complete Rebuilding" to turn what he called a "tired, broken, and dilapidated Center" into a "World Class Bastion of Arts, Music, and Entertainment." In other words, more of the lies and rubbish the public has come to expect.

Only later did the Trump-dominated Kennedy Center administration circulate a letter internally acknowledging that performances would in fact cease for an extended period.

To anyone with eyes to see, the timing and manner of the move, coming after a wave of cancellations and boycotts in response to Trump's seizure of the center's board and its rebranding as the "Trump Kennedy Center," make obvious this is a politically motivated, face-saving maneuver rather than a genuine renovation plan. If the situation for artists and the attacks on democratic rights were not so deadly serious, Trump's "renovation" plan would be met primarily with derisive laughter.

In the past year alone, major artists have pulled out to protest Trump's turning of the center into an ideological masthead. On January 27, composer Philip Glass withdrew the world premiere of his Symphony No. 15, "Lincoln," stating that the center's "current values" are in direct conflict with the work's democratic and egalitarian themes.

Ticket sales have already fallen by over a third compared to the previous year, leaving entire rows empty in the hall's principal venues and deepening what even establishment observers describe as a "crisis" at the institution.

Trump has attempted to present the closure as a bold act of visionary stewardship. "We're going to be using the steel,"

he boasted when asked whether he was simply planning to demolish the landmark structure, adding that "some of the marble will be removed" and promising something "completely refreshed and truly stunning" when it reopens. Yet, despite assurances that he is "not tearing it down," the vague references to stripping the building "down to the steel" and rebuilding it as an "Entertainment Complex" strongly suggest that what is underway is not preservation but the effective scrapping of the Kennedy Center as a serious cultural institution.

Musicians and staff members, already operating under the cloud of Trump's right-wing cultural purge, now confront the additional threat of layoffs, contract shredding and the potential dispersal of one of the country's major orchestras.

While Kennedy Center officials insist the National Symphony Orchestra (NSO)—founded in 1930 and which has made the Kennedy Center its principal performing venue—is "not pulling out," they have provided no clear explanation as to where the orchestra will perform or how it will survive two years without its home stage and subscription base.

"Orchestras are not like buildings. You can't simply close them down for two years and expect that you can open them up again. They're living organisms," pointed out an unnamed representative of the American Federation of Musicians Local 161710, which represents the NSO musicians, to the *Washington Post*.

The *Post* writes that neither musicians nor unions have been given clarity on "where a full symphony orchestra can rehearse and perform, week after week, in a space that matches the size and acoustics of the Concert Hall." The absence of such accommodations "risks damaging both its sound and its relationship with audiences and subscribers."

To date, the official calendar still lists NSO and other events well past the July 4 closure date, implying mass refunds and cancellations that will inflict further financial damage and reputational harm.

Moreover, arts management experts, and even figures

close to the Kennedy Center, question the basic premise of a full two-year shutdown. Andrew Taylor, an arts management professor at American University, noted in *The Conversation* that “a more strategic, phased approach” was already being planned, which would have allowed major renovations “while allowing artists, audiences, and donors to continue utilizing the center.” He added that such a phased strategy had been part of the center’s budget request to Congress before Trump’s announcement.

A prominent architecture critic told NPR that “nothing in the public plans justifies closing an entire multi-venue campus for two years,” while a former senior programming official, speaking anonymously, called the timeline “logistically unnecessary and financially reckless.”

The legality of Trump’s shutdown plan is itself in question. The Kennedy Center is a federal entity created and defined by statute; its basic purpose and even its name are laid down in federal law. It is well known that—at least on paper—Congress, not the White House, has ultimate authority over its mission and operations.

Yet Trump has already moved to neutralize potential opposition on the board. The *Post* reported previously that in May 2025 the Kennedy Center quietly rewrote its bylaws so that “only trustees appointed by the president could vote,” explicitly barring ex officio members appointed by Congress (including the leaders of both parties in the House and Senate) from voting or even counting toward a quorum. These actions effectively transformed the center’s leadership into a rubber stamp for the administration.

The closure of the nation’s most prominent performing arts center occurs within the broader context of the Trump administration’s frontal assault on culture and democratic forms of rule. It coincides with the deployment of heavily armed ICE agents into major cities, producing mass roundups, arbitrary detentions and cold-blooded murder of members of the public along with invasions and plots for war abroad.

Culturally, this home front repression is bound up with the administration’s campaign against museums and national parks, including threats to strip funding from the Smithsonian because it supposedly focuses too much on “how bad Slavery was” and not enough on America’s “Brightness.”

The planned closure of the Kennedy Center will coincide with the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Under Trump’s plans, the Kennedy Center—a major center of symphonic music, opera, ballet and theater—will go dark at the same time that the administration has announced a series of absurd and culturally debased spectacles to mark the historic date.

As part of the run-up to this year’s July Fourth

celebrations, Trump has touted plans to stage a full-contact Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) event on the White House grounds. Last year, Trump told supporters, “We’re going to have a UFC fight ... on the grounds of the White House ... a championship fight, full fight—like 20, 25,000 people. UFC CEO and Trump supporter Dana White has been tasked to “do it” as part of the official celebrations.

Last month, Trump signed an executive order to launch an IndyCar “Freedom 250 Grand Prix” through the streets of Washington D.C., near the National Mall. The order instructs the Interior and Transportation Departments to design a route “that showcases the majesty of Washington, D.C., and its iconic national monuments,” with a multi-day race weekend currently slated for August 21–23 and promoted as the first-ever street race in the nation’s capital.

Trump’s attacks on cultural life unfold under conditions in which millions across the country are out of work, including tens of thousands of federal and contract workers in the D.C. region who have already been laid off through budget cuts and agency restructurings and now queue at church basements and local charities for food assistance.

The dismantling of a leading cultural institution at the very moment when social inequality, authoritarianism and militarism are reaching unprecedented heights is not an accident. It expresses the deep cultural and moral degeneration of the American bourgeoisie, for whom serious art, historical reflection and critical thought are intolerable obstacles to a regime of oligarchic plunder and repression. It is inseparable from his drive toward dictatorship at home and war abroad.



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