

# CBS censors Stephen Colbert's interview with James Talarico, Texas Democrat for US Senate

**Kevin Reed****18 February 2026**

On Monday, CBS blocked the broadcast of Stephen Colbert's taped interview with Texas Democratic U.S. Senate candidate James Talarico on "The Late Show." The network claimed the action was prompted by the Federal Communications Commission's threatened imposition of the "equal time" rule regarding air-time for all political candidates.

The interview with Talarico was taped in New York as a standard "Late Show" segment and was slated to air on Monday's broadcast. The interview is part of Talarico's campaign to unseat Republican Senator Ted Cruz in Texas in the November midterm election. After the taping, however, CBS's lawyers informed the show that, according to the new guidance from Trump's FCC stooge Brendan Carr, airing the discussion could trigger "equal time" obligations to other candidates, including Democratic Representative Jasmine Crockett and Republican contenders.

According to multiple reports, the legal department explicitly told Colbert's team that Talarico could not appear in the broadcast and warned that even acknowledging the network's decision on air could create additional regulatory risk. Colbert nevertheless opened Monday night's show by telling viewers that the interview had been pulled and that he had been instructed not to say so, turning the first minutes of the program into an open confrontation with his own network.

On Tuesday, CBS scrambled to deny it had censored the segment, issuing a legalistic statement that exposes both its deference to the FCC and the broader attack on basic democratic and First Amendment rights.

With the broadcast segment suppressed, the Colbert show shifted the full, roughly 15-minute conversation with Talarico to YouTube and other online platforms, which are not governed by the broadcast-era equal time rule. The Monday CBS broadcast then promoted the online interview while refusing to show it, a split distribution that dramatized the widening gap between regulated broadcast outlets and comparatively less regulated streaming and digital platforms.

As of this writing the YouTube stream has received 3.1 million views which is greater than the average nightly viewership of Colbert's program which is reported to be between 2.3 and 2.8 million viewers.

During his opening monologue, Colbert defied the orders not to mention either Talarico or the internal decision to cut the segment from the broadcast. "Talarico was supposed to be here," Colbert told the audience, before explaining that "we got a call directly from my network's lawyers, who said, in no uncertain terms, that we could not have him on the show."

He went further, describing how the censorship was meant to be invisible. "I was told—not very clearly—that not only could I not have him on, I could not even say that I couldn't have him on." Colbert then turned that instruction on its head, adding, "Since my network clearly prefers we not talk about this, let's talk about it." Thus, Colbert was making it clear he would use the remaining months of his show to challenge corporate and state interference with political content.

Colbert linked CBS's action directly to Carr's new guidance, telling viewers that the FCC chair had suggested late-night and daytime talk shows would no longer be treated as exempt from equal time and that CBS was already behaving "as if he had" formally stripped the exception. He argued that the decision was not about law but about corporate risk management, saying the network was enforcing Carr's posture "for financial reasons," as it is already set to end "The Late Show" and exit late-night entertainment later this year.

Facing immediate public backlash and headlines about its censorship, CBS's statements attempted to reframe the episode as a matter of neutral legal advice rather than political interference. "CBS did not prevent 'The Late Show' from airing the interview with Rep. James Talarico," a network spokesperson said, directly contradicting Colbert's account that he had been told he "could not have him on the show."

A telltale sign of the hand of the Trump White House was the ever-evolving series of lies about what happened. The network insisted that, "The Late Show was not prohibited by CBS from broadcasting the interview," but that it "was provided legal guidance that the broadcast could trigger the FCC equal-time rule for two other candidates, including Rep. Jasmine Crockett, and presented options for how the equal time for other candidates could be fulfilled."

With this explanation, CBS was claiming that it was the show's own decision to move the Talarico interview to YouTube and promote it from the broadcast "rather than potentially providing the equal-time options," as though it were a matter of a cost-benefit analysis.

No one believes this. This explanation shows how far CBS, owned by Paramount Skydance, is prepared to go to support the Trump White House, no matter the claims about "guidance" and "options" coming from the FCC. The corporate decision makers issued an order and tried to use the threat of an FCC enforcement as justification.

The "equal time" or "equal opportunities" rule dates to the early decades of broadcasting and is codified in Section 315 of the Communications Act. It requires any station that gives a legally qualified candidate for public office "use" of its facilities—typically by

appearing as a guest or in advertising—to afford equivalent opportunities to all other candidates for that office who request them.

Over time, the FCC established several exceptions, most importantly for “bona fide news” programming, including regularly scheduled newscasts, news interview shows, documentaries where the appearance is incidental, and on-the-spot coverage of news events.

Late-night shows like “The Tonight Show” and “The Late Show,” as well as daytime programs like “The View,” have long been treated as falling under the bona fide news interview exception, even though they are primarily entertainment, precisely to allow wide-ranging political discussion without mechanically triggering equal time claims every time a candidate appears.

Colbert emphasized on Monday that “The Late Show” is not a news program, and thus historically has not been treated as a regular campaign platform in the sense meant by equal time. He noted that the rule applies to broadcast television but does not cover streaming services, which is why the Talarico interview could be posted on YouTube without consequence.

The bogus nature of the FCC notice that Colbert cited acknowledged that it had “not received any evidence that the interview segment of any late night or daytime television talk show currently airing would qualify for the bona fide news exemption,” a statement that effectively admits the FCC is violating its own long-standing carve-out for these shows.

What is at stake is not formalistic compliance but the use of equal time as a pretext to suppress political speech in entertainment formats that reach millions of viewers and often provide the only venue where candidates are questioned aggressively or informally. By treating Colbert’s interview as a potential violation—while also leaving the propaganda function of sympathetic right-wing outlets untouched—the Trump-led FCC is signaling that it will selectively deploy regulatory tools against media as needed for explicitly political purposes.

FCC chair Brendan Carr—who played a filthy role in the Jimmy Kimmel affair last year—has been central to this policy. In a January 21 notice to networks and in subsequent comments at his monthly press conference, Carr argued that the long-standing exemption for daytime talk shows and late-night programs had been abused, saying the agency would take a “more proactive stance” in responding to complaints from candidates excluded from such shows.

Carr warned that programs that want the exemption must behave like genuine news operations: “If you’re fake news, you’re not going to qualify for the bona fide news exemption,” he said, in comments that late-night hosts and press freedom advocates interpreted as a threat to treat comedy shows as campaign advertising rather than editorial content.

At the same time, Carr lashed out at reports that he is “removing” the exemption, insisting he is merely enforcing the statute and its legislative history. The contradiction between Carr’s formal denials and the practical effect of his guidance reveals the fundamentally political character of the move.

The conflict over the Talarico interview is part of the Trump administration’s threats to revoke broadcast licenses of networks he considers hostile or “fake news,” and has sought to use regulatory agencies, including the FCC, to intimidate and discipline media outlets.

The Talarico case is also bound up with Trump’s obsession with Texas, a rapidly changing state where demographic and political shifts have raised the prospect of a competitive Senate race. As Talarico himself noted in the YouTube segment, “I think Donald Trump is

worried we’re about to flip Texas,” linking the FCC’s sudden focus on his appearances on “The View” and “The Late Show” to the administration’s desire to limit the exposure to his criticisms of Trump.

Paramount Skydance is controlled by David Ellison, who became chairman and CEO of the combined company after the Skydance-Paramount merger closed and the new Paramount Skydance Corporation was formed. Under the post-merger ownership structure, Ellison holds about 50 percent of the voting rights, with his father Larry Ellison holding 27.5 percent and RedBird Capital 22.5 percent, making David Ellison the key controlling owner in practice.

Estimates of David Ellison’s personal net worth before the merger put it at around 500 million dollars, largely tied to his stake in Skydance and its hit franchises like “Top Gun: Maverick.” After the merger his wealth is now widely understood to be significantly higher, although precise current figures are not publicly disclosed.

Ellison has a close, collaborative relationship with Donald Trump and his administration. He has repeatedly visited the White House during Trump’s second term, often alongside his father, a long-time Trump ally.

News reports indicate that David Ellison met privately with Trump at the White House in early February 2026, holding two extended discussions just days before Trump publicly claimed to be “not involved” in Paramount’s aggressive bid to take over Warner Bros. Discovery and CNN. Ellison has reportedly assured Trump officials he would “reform” CNN if he acquired it.

Like the decision to end “The Late Show with Stephen Colbert” last July was used as a quid pro quo in the FCC approval of the Paramount Skydance merger, the censorship of the Talarico interview is a demonstration of the coming together of the financial oligarchy across key industries with the fascist Trump regime.

The role of Paramount Skydance shows that decisions about what tens of millions see are made by a tiny group of billionaires whose overriding concern is their profits and making sure that their candidates remain in office while trampling on fundamental democratic rights.

The gangsterism of the financial oligarchy is exercised through de facto control over the information environment by ownership concentration, regulatory leverage, and the constant threats of economic retaliation. Under the oligarchy, information is being managed such that anything that could offend the Trump regime or threaten the concentration of corporate assets is silenced by fines, legal action or being put out of business.



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