

Court rules that Trump's name must be removed from the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

Kevin Reed
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A confidential internal memorandum circulated Thursday by the general counsel of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D. C. instructed staff to begin the immediate removal of Donald Trump's name from the institution's programs, signage, donor materials and digital platforms, following a federal court ruling invalidating the controversial renaming of the center.

According to individuals familiar with the document, the memo directed departments to act "without delay to ensure compliance with the court's order," adding that "all references to the Trump designation, whether physical, digital or promotional, must be discontinued pending further legal review."

Center staff were further advised not to comment publicly and to refer all inquiries to legal counsel, underscoring the politically charged character of the unfolding crisis within one of the most prominent cultural institutions in the US.

The directive follows the ruling handed down May 29 by Judge Christopher R. Cooper of the District Court for the District of Columbia, which found that the Trump-aligned board's attempt to rename the Kennedy Center violated both statutory requirements and the terms of the institution's congressional charter.

In a sharply worded opinion, Judge Cooper concluded that the board—stacked with Trump's political allies and major donors—had exceeded its authority by attempting to fundamentally alter the identity of a federally chartered cultural institution without congressional approval. The illegality of the action was obvious to everyone. Trump and his band of thugs simply pushed ahead regardless.

At the center of the ruling was the legal status of the Kennedy Center itself. Established as the National Cultural Center by Congress in 1958, it was named after John F. Kennedy in 1964 as a "living memorial" following his assassination on November 22, 1963. The institution operates under a hybrid public-private structure that imposes specific constraints on governance.

The court found that these constraints were ignored by the Trump-appointed board, which had voted to rename the facility in what the judge described as a "procedurally defective and substantively unlawful action."

The decision emphasized that the board's composition raised serious questions about conflicts of interest and political interference. Several members had direct financial or political ties to Trump, and internal communications presented during the trial suggested that the renaming effort was driven less by cultural considerations than by personal loyalty and branding ambitions.

The court concluded that "the board's actions represent an impermissible politicization of a national cultural institution," and ordered the immediate restoration of the Kennedy Center's original name.

The decision by Judge Cooper was in response to a lawsuit filed last year by a coalition of artists, former board members and public interest organizations. The plaintiffs argued that the renaming represented an unlawful privatization of a public cultural asset and a violation of the center's founding mission. Filed in federal court in Washington D. C., the suit contended that the board had acted "in direct contravention of federal law, institutional bylaws and the public trust."

Among those involved in the legal challenge were prominent figures in the performing arts, as well as nonprofit advocacy groups concerned with cultural preservation. The complaint detailed how the renaming decision was rushed through without adequate consultation, public input or legal review. It also highlighted concerns about donor influence, alleging that major contributors were granted disproportionate sway over institutional decisions in exchange for financial support.

The plaintiffs' case gained momentum as additional revelations emerged about the governance of the center under the Trump board. Testimony during the proceedings painted a picture of an organization increasingly (and almost exclusively) subordinated to political and financial interests, with artistic priorities sidelined in favor of branding initiatives and donor appeasement.

Trump's response to the court's decision was immediate and characteristically vile. In a series of social media posts, he denounced the ruling as "a disgrace" and attacked the presiding judge—appointed by Barack Obama in 2014—as "totally biased" and "a political operative in robes." Trump further threatened to "walk away from the entire project," suggesting that his continued involvement had been contingent on the recognition of his name.

In one post, Trump continued his tantrum writing, "without me, the Kennedy Center would be nothing," while in another he asserted that the ruling was part of a broader "witch hunt" against him and his supporters. Sources close to the situation indicated that Trump had privately expressed fury over the decision, reportedly describing it as a personal betrayal by individuals he had previously supported.

The outburst reveals that the renaming of the Kennedy Center was bound up with Trump's Hitlerian ambitions like so much of what he has been spending his time on such as the White House ballroom, the reflecting pool and "Triumphal Arch" in Washington.

What was presented publicly as an effort to “revitalize” the Kennedy Center was, in practice, a campaign to elevate the Trump brand onto a major national and cultural landmark.

Opposition from the artistic community had been building for months prior to the court ruling. Numerous performers withdrew from scheduled appearances at the center in protest of the renaming, citing concerns about political interference and the erosion of artistic independence. The wave of cancellations eventually forced the center to suspend much of its programming, effectively shutting down its season.

The boycott exposed divisions within the cultural world and highlighted the extent of resistance among artists to Trump’s politics. Artists described the renaming as a symbol of the broader degradation of public institutions under the influence of the wealth and power of the financial oligarchy of which Trump is a political representative.

After the string of cancellations, Trump announced plans for a sweeping renovation of the building, framing it as a necessary step to modernize the facility. While it is true that the Kennedy Center has long required maintenance and upgrades—its infrastructure has shown signs of age and neglect—this fact points to the essential truth that Trump is the product of the historical degeneration and long-term shift of the ruling establishment away from the arts and toward crass money making and wealth accumulation.

Critics of the Trump plan said the renovation initiative was to consolidate control and redirect resources, rather than to address the significant needs of the institution, as well as to divert attention from the embarrassing departure of or boycott by serious artists at the Kennedy Center.

Reports indicated that planning was conducted with minimal input from artistic staff, and that funding arrangements lacked transparency.

Financial controversies surrounding the center intensified scrutiny of its leadership. A recent report by the *Financial Times* detailed allegations of questionable fundraising practices, including a case in which an individual described as a “fake CIA operative” reportedly made a \$2 million donation in an apparent effort to secure support from the Trump administration in a private business dispute.

The Kennedy Center, under Trump’s hand-picked board, became a vehicle for influence and corrupt interests within the financial elite. The intertwining of money, political loyalty and institutional governance and subordination of cultural issues to those phenomena are part of the swirling cesspool of everything done by the American ruling class.

The degeneracy of the elite is nowhere more obvious than the planned Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) match on the White House lawn as part of the 250th anniversary celebrations scheduled to take place on June 14. At an estimated cost of \$60 million, the president of the United States will oversee the closest modern-day equivalent to Roman gladiators of the second century BC.

In contrast to the Trump government’s quasi-sponsorship of the UFC and its grotesque spectacle is the situation facing the National Symphony Orchestra (NSO), which has been grappling with severe financial difficulties. The NSO, which has made the Kennedy Center its principal performing venue, is one of the few ensembles or performers that did not pull out after Trump’s name was added. Its finances are deeply entangled with the institution, which heavily subsidizes the orchestra.

Musicians have repeatedly appealed to the Kennedy Center’s leadership for support, warning that the orchestra requires approximately \$40 million to maintain operations, hire musicians and

secure venues.

According to reporting by the *Washington Post*, members of the orchestra described a “crisis situation,” noting that repeated requests for information and assistance had gone unanswered. One musician stated that “we are being left in limbo, with no clear plan and no meaningful engagement from leadership,” highlighting the disconnect between the institution’s stated mission and its actual priorities.

Ben Folds, who resigned from his post as artistic advisor to the NSO following Trump’s takeover of the Kennedy Center, recently shared an open letter in which he warned that the orchestra “is in real trouble—it may not survive.”

He wrote:

Currently there’s no announcement for programming for the NSO’s upcoming season. All other orchestras have announced theirs by now because planning is always about 18 months ahead of performances. The NSO doesn’t even know if it has a home, given the previously announced two-year closure of the Kennedy Center. This is a very bad sign.

Folds added,

I’ve been saying for years that the symphony orchestra institution was itself a symbol of civilization. For us to strive to work together for the greater good, we need to see that in action, and symphony orchestras do this every night. It’s an important symbol and when the symphony erodes, that’s the sounding of an alarm for the health of actual civilization. I’ve spouted this from stages in front of most of the orchestras in the country. Audiences may have tired of hearing it. But this threat is happening now, and our National Symphony Orchestra needs us.

The events surrounding the Kennedy Center underscore the urgent need to defend cultural institutions as critical to the public good, accessible to all and insulated from the influence of wealth and power. The fulfillment of this necessity falls to the struggle of the working class for socialism as the capitalist oligarchy has proven itself uninterested and hostile to the preservation of the artistic and cultural achievements of the past.



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