

## **The International Academy of Trial Lawyers Calls to Defend Free Speech and a Free Press**

**Wednesday, September 24, 2025:** As a leading proponent and defender of the Rule of Law, the [International Academy of Trial Lawyers](#) (the Academy) cannot remain silent as this administration directly assaults both the Constitution and the Rule of Law. The First Amendment does not serve to protect government officials from criticism. To the contrary, the First Amendment guards the people's right to criticize their leaders.

Threatening to pull licenses, pressuring networks, and directing government agencies like the FCC to silence disfavored voices move us toward state-controlled media. These actions cross a constitutional red line. They are typical of dictatorships, not democracies. Russia, China, North Korea, and other authoritarian governments control the press.

In the United States, the press has the duty and right to question and investigate those in power. It is not the media's role to flatter a President. Additionally, comedy and satire have always played a vital role in a democracy. From court jesters who spoke truth to kings to late-night hosts who lampoon the powerful, political speech has appeared in many forms, and each deserves protection. Mockery of the government is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign of a free people. In a democracy, power flows upward from the people, not downward from a President who demands fealty and praise.

President Theodore Roosevelt understood that criticism, and especially criticism of the President, is essential to our democracy. He proclaimed that: "To announce that there must be no criticism of the President, or that we are to stand by the President, right or wrong, is not only unpatriotic and servile, but is morally treasonable to the American public."

Now is not the time for indifference. The Rule of Law cannot survive if we permit those in power to decide what we may say about them. The independence of the press is not negotiable, the Constitution is not optional, and freedom is not for sale. It follows, as the Supreme Court affirmed in [National Rifle Association v. Vullo](#) (2024), that "Government officials cannot attempt to coerce private parties in order to punish or suppress views that the government disfavors."

The Academy will continue to speak out and vigorously defend the media and the right of the press and all citizens to criticize the government without fear of reprisal.