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**SUNDAY, MARCH 08, 2026**

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## **Coalition of Unions, Press Freedom Organizations, Editors and Journalists Win Major Victory As Judge Rules Kari Lake's USAGM Appointment Illegal, Cancels Mass Firings at VOA**

WASHINGTON – In a major victory for federal workers, this weekend, D.C. federal judge Royce Lamberth ruled that Kari Lake had illegally served as Acting CEO of the United States Agency for Global Media (USAGM), the agency overseeing Voice of America (VOA). The Court, granting a motion for summary judgment filed by labor unions, Press Freedom Organizations, editors and journalists, ruled that the actions taken by Lake since March of 2025 are legally void. That includes the August 29, 2025 reduction in force (RIF) eliminating the jobs of hundreds of Voice of America (VOA) employees. That RIF had previously been suspended by Judge Lamberth pending rulings by the Court, and thus all the employees targeted by the RIF have remained employed.

The lawsuit was filed by a coalition of 13 plaintiffs consisting of federal worker unions, individual employees and press freedom organizations. The four union plaintiffs representing USAGM employees are the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), and The News Guild CWA. The seven individual employees include VOA White House bureau chief Patsy Widakuswara, VOA press freedom editor Jessica Jerreat, and Kate Neeper, USAGM's director of strategy and performance assessment. The two press freedom organizations are Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) and Reporters Without Borders, Inc. (RSF USA).

Plaintiffs are represented by Emery Celli Brinckerhoff Abady Ward & Maazel LLP, Democracy Forward, Democracy Defenders Fund, and the Government Accountability Project.

Shortly before the now-cancelled RIF, the Administration and Lake also attempted to cancel USAGM employees' collective bargaining rights. But AFSCME and AFGE challenged that action in separate litigation and were successful, restoring those workers' union rights and CBAs. Now their RIF is officially cancelled too.



who provide hope for freedom to those living under oppressive governments around the world. Yet time and again, this administration has attempted to strip these proud AFSCME members of their collective bargaining freedoms and their jobs. AFSCME members will continue to stand with the public service workers who defend democracy and ensure the voices of freedom are heard around the world,” said **AFSCME President Lee Saunders**.

“Today’s ruling is a victory for Voice of America workers, their unions, journalism, and the global free press. It’s also a reminder of what working people can achieve when we stand together, in our unions, against the misguided, illegal attempts to dismantle our federal government,” said **Everett Kelley, AFGE National President**.

“Voice of America exists to tell the truth to the world—and in doing so, it represents one of America’s most important sources of soft power. That mission depends on a professional, protected workforce and respect for the law. Judge Lamberth’s decision makes clear that neither can simply be cast aside. AFSA was proud to stand with our union partners and VOA journalists to defend both the people who do this work and the integrity of the institution itself,” said **John Dinkelman, president of the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA)**.

“Judge Lamberth’s ruling confirms what we knew when we first filed this lawsuit almost one year ago: that Kari Lake and the Trump administration acted unlawfully in gutting Voice of America (VOA). There is still more to unpack in this decision and work to be done to ensure VOA’s journalists get back to work. Beyond the immediate implications of the decision, this case is proof that fighting for press freedom matters,” said **Clayton Weimers, Executive Director of RSF USA**.

“It turns out Kari Lake and the president have to follow the law. Congress and the president approved funding and Lake illegally withheld it and acted as a defacto CEO when she wasn’t. Lake’s illegal cuts have made the world worse off, because she’s cut journalism that would be going to parts of the world that need it now: Iran, North Korea, China, Vietnam and more. The cuts are embarrassing and shameful. We appreciate Judge Lamberth’s ruling in favor of the law and international journalism,” said **Jon Schleuss, President The NewsGuild-CWA**.

“Today is a win in the fight against autocracy. The court confirmed what we have long known: Kari Lake took over not to lead U.S. Agency for Global Media, but to dismantle it. Not only are Lake’s actions contrary to the mandate of Congress, but the president’s installation of her at the agency without Senate confirmation also violated the Constitution. Voice of America has played a critical role since World War II to combat misinformation and disinformation, often promulgated by the world’s autocrats. This decision is a powerful affirmation of the rule of law and comes as threats to democracy loom not only around the world, but here at home. The court’s action protects federal media professionals across the Voice of



“Kari Lake has run amok at USAGM with devastating effects, including on the journalists who work at Voice of America, on its vital journalistic mission—and on the rule of law itself. As we told the court, her tenure as acting CEO last year was contrary to the Constitution and to other law. This ruling finding as much is a welcome development for all those who care about journalism—and a government that follows the law,” said **Ambassador Norman Eisen (ret.), Executive Chair of Democracy Defenders Fund.**

“The rule of law has triumphed. We are privileged to represent our courageous clients and are grateful for the selfless contributions from our outstanding co-counsel,” said **David Seide, Of Counsel for the Government Accountability Project.**

"Judge Lamberth's decision makes clear that Kari Lake did not have the legal authority to serve as Acting CEO of the U.S. Agency for Global Media. Her actions had serious consequences for journalists and federal workers, including the attempted reduction in force at Voice of America. We are proud to stand with unions, journalists, and press freedom organizations in defending the rule of law and the independence of public service journalism," said **Debbie Greenberger, Partner, and Nick Bourland, Associate, at Emery Celli Brinckerhoff Abady Ward & Maazel LLP.**

A copy of the judge's ruling can be found [here](#).

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AFSCME's 1.4 million members provide the vital services that make America happen. With members in communities across the nation, serving in hundreds of different occupations – from nurses to corrections officers, child care providers to sanitation workers – AFSCME advocates for fairness in the workplace, excellence in public services and freedom and opportunity for all working families.

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