

## Kennedy Center removes Trump's name from building

After courts knocked down attempts to delay the signage change, workers began taking letters off the performing arts center's exterior early Saturday morning.

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Spectators watch as workers put up scaffolding ahead of a court-mandated deadline to remove President Donald Trump's name from the Kennedy Center's facade. (Craig Hudson/For The Washington Post)

By [Jonathan Edwards](#)

President Donald Trump's name is off the Kennedy Center.

Crews at the performing arts venue started removing it from the front of the building around 3 a.m., several hours after the center missed [a federal judge's two-week deadline](#) to do so. The judge had ruled that the decision by the center's board of trustees to rename it was illegal.

With the removal of 18 letters — “The Donald J. Trump and” — the building's exterior reads “The John F. Kennedy Memorial Center for the Performing Arts” once more. Trump's name had been on the facade for 176 days, a dramatic change to the 55-year-old memorial to an assassinated president.



A worker removes a letter from the Kennedy Center's front sign, as crews enforce a court order to take Trump's name off the building. (Craig Hudson/For The Washington Post)

Around midnight, the center filed a request to extend the deadline to noon Saturday, saying storms had delayed the work, capping a day of construction work and a flurry of legal maneuvering.

A judge granted the extension, and around 11 a.m. Saturday the center confirmed in a court filing that its work was done. A tarp still covered the facade.

A crowd had gathered in front of the arts venue to watch the results of a lawsuit brought by Rep. Joyce Beatty (D-Ohio), an ex officio trustee who [sued her fellow trustees](#) for adding Trump's name to the title of the Kennedy Center. A federal judge agreed the move was illegal and late last month ordered the center to remove Trump's name by the end of this week.

Hours before Friday's deadline, two courts denied the Kennedy Center's [last-ditch attempt to delay](#) the removal, even as crews erected scaffolding next to the building.

U.S. District Judge Christopher Cooper ruled at 1 p.m. that the Kennedy Center's lawyers failed to demonstrate they were likely to win their appeal or that the center would suffer "irreparable harm" if Trump's name were removed. At 3:46 p.m., Justice Department lawyers representing the center appealed Cooper's denial, filing an emergency motion for a stay with the Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit.

Shortly after 7 p.m., the appeals court denied the second attempt. A demonstrator broke the news to more than 100 people at a Hands Off the Arts rally in front of the Kennedy Center. The crowd erupted in cheers.

"Right now, that name has to come down!" a protester yelled.

Beatty stopped by the Kennedy Center around the same time, taking a victory lap and making a dig at Trump. She posted an [Instagram video](#) of her inside the center doing the president's signature dance set to the Village People's "YMCA," a staple at Trump rallies.

Some in the crowd thanked her for fighting the name change and asked her for photos.

"It's overwhelming, it's impactful, it's rewarding, it's humbling," Beatty said of her legal victory, adding: "You can fight against injustices and win."

Removing Trump's name is the most tangible setback in the president's 15-month effort to take over the storied arts institution.

In February 2025, Trump purged the center's board of trustees and replaced them with political allies who then [elected him board chair](#). In December, those loyalists voted to [rename the center](#), casting it as a bipartisan recognition of his contributions to the arts institution.

Trump claimed that the [board's vote](#) to do so was a surprise, but he had joked about the change for months.

His name was [on the website](#) within hours and on the building the next morning. Justice Department lawyers representing Trump later acknowledged that, given the speed with which the signage was installed, it had been "prepared and/or purchased prior to the Board's vote the day before."

The addition of Trump's name sparked immediate backlash from the arts community and members of the Kennedy family, who argued that the renaming desecrated a living memorial to the assassinated president. Congress established the center in 1964, two months after Kennedy's death, designating it "the sole national monument to his memory within the city of Washington and its environs."

In December, Beatty sued after she was muted during a virtual board meeting when she tried to voice opposition to the name change, which she said was illegal.

Five months later, Cooper agreed. Congress was "crystal clear," the judge wrote, when in 1964 it passed legislation changing the name of the National Cultural Center to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, designating it as "a living memorial" to the president who had been assassinated the year before.

"Congress gave the Kennedy Center its name," Cooper wrote, "and only Congress can change it."

Cooper ordered the center remove Trump's name from everything it had rebranded; signs, shuttle buses, social media usernames, documents, a visitor guide, sweatshirts and tote bags — all of it had to go.



The center swapped in gift shop items, too. (Maxine Wallace/The Washington Post)

At first, the Kennedy Center signaled it would comply. A [memo from its general counsel office](#) last week instructed staff to begin the scrubbing, and the title of the [website was restored Monday](#).

"We are complying with the court's order while evaluating all legal options to preserve this revitalization and recognize President Trump's leadership," spokeswoman Roma Daravi said.

But in a special meeting Thursday, the center's board of trustees voted to file a court challenge that would pause the ruling, allowing the largest sign to stay put while they appealed. The legal challenges left the fate of the sign uncertain, even as a crowd gathered Friday to observe it.

About 150 people waited for a 14-member crew to build the scaffolding needed to remove the 18 offending letters. The atmosphere was festival-like: People brought their dogs, their partners and their children. They oohed as lightning spidered across the sky and ahhed at a double rainbow. They cheered when a one-wheel skater zipped through the center's horseshoe driveway in a rainbow crop top and shorts, waving a bisexual Pride flag.

The Foo Fighters' "My Hero" blasted, followed by one request from the audience: Remove the "T" first.

Demonstrators cheered the arrival of a rainbow after storm clouds. (Craig Hudson/For The Washington Post)

The renaming had felt like a "horrible scar" that left some neighbors unable to even look at the building, let alone go inside, said Grace Terpstra, a Watergate resident who helped organize a group called Keep the KC. Getting the name off would restore something the community thought it had lost, Terpstra said.

"It's like a feeling of relief, it's a feeling of completion, of wholeness," she said. "It was an attack, and we righted it."

Trump himself has given mixed signals about his interest in forging ahead with the center's transformation. After Cooper's ruling, Trump lashed out at the judge and suggested he would abandon his involvement in the Kennedy Center altogether. More recently, he appeared to walk that back. "I'm the chairman, so we'll just keep it going," he told reporters aboard Air Force One.

The White House this week disputed that Cooper's rulings were a "defeat" for Trump.

Still pending is the ultimate fate of the building's closure, which Trump announced in February to the surprise of staff and some trustees. Cooper's order temporarily paused the board's plan to shut down for two years of repairs, calling it too hastily considered, but he didn't stop renovations and said trustees could reconsider the shutdown more deliberately.

The center has argued that interrupting its plans, including the signage change, could be catastrophic. In a filing Friday, Assistant Attorney General Brett Shumate argued that without Trump's name on the building, fundraising would not just stop, but money already raised or committed would have to be returned.

According to "bylaws of the Trump Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Foundation," Shumate said, some donations are conditioned on Trump's name remaining on the center and its branding, meaning "hundreds of millions of dollars" would have to be returned or refused.

Beatty's lawyers called the argument, which the center had never raised in the lower court, "meritless."

The Kennedy Center, in an email, referred to "the establishment of the Trump Kennedy Center Fund" but did not respond to questions seeking detail, including whether the private fundraising is conditional on Trump's branding.

Earlier Saturday morning, Beatty was in front of the center with a handful of die-hards, as crews draped tarp around the scaffolding, shielding the sign from view.

"Whether it's covered up or not," she said, "we'll see that the name has been removed."