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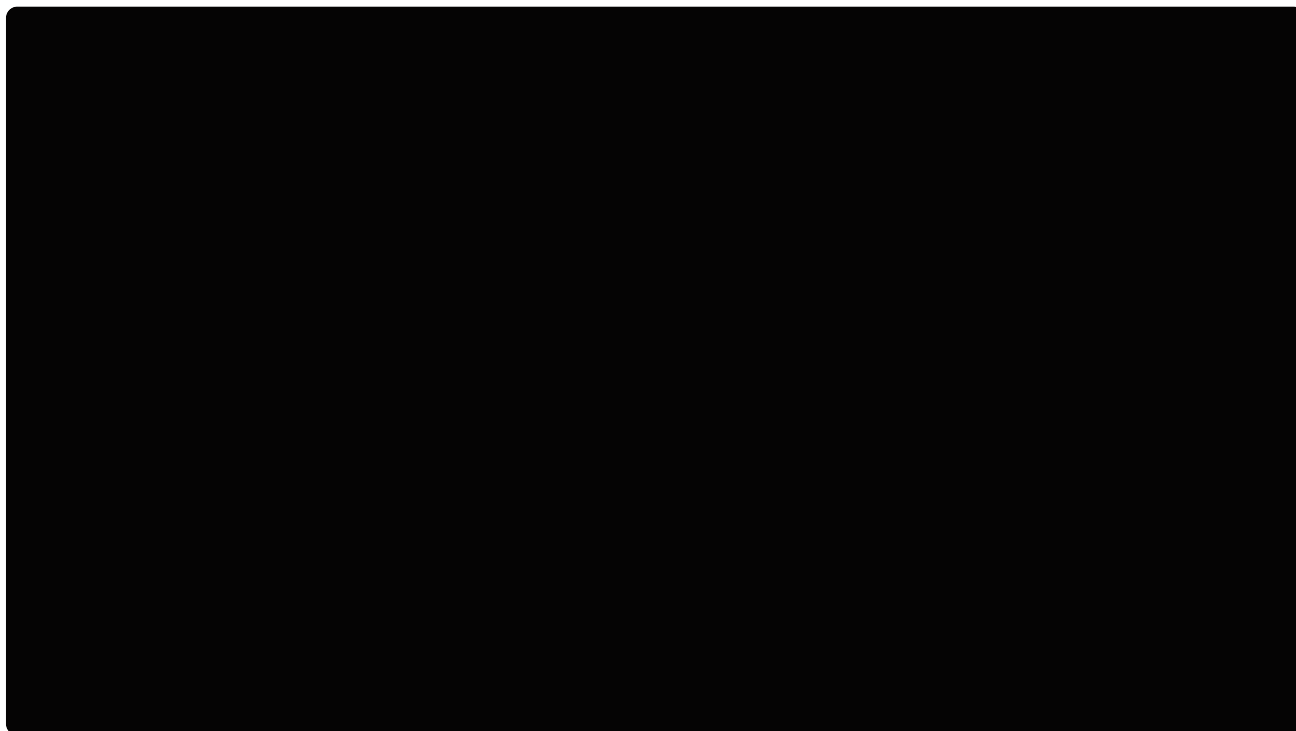
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Trump says steel to be 'fully exposed' in Kennedy Center rebuild but 'not ripping it down'

His move faces harsh criticism from some Democrats and Kennedy family members.

By [Michelle Stoddart](#), [Emily Chang](#), [Benjamin Siegel](#), and [Leah Sarnoff](#)

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Trump says Kennedy Center is closing for 2 years for 'complete rebuilding' President Donald Trump announced on Sunday that he will be temporarily closing entertainment operations at the Kennedy Center for "approximately" two years.

Kevin Lamarque/Reuters

President Donald Trump on Monday elaborated on his plan to close the Kennedy Center and rebuild it, saying that the steel would be "fully exposed" in the process but insisted that, "I'm not ripping it down."

When asked by a reporter at an Oval Office photo op whether he wanted to tear it down, Trump said that he will be “using the steel” and “some of the marble” for the renovation.

"I'm not ripping it down. I'll be using the steel. So, we're using the structure. We're using some of the marble and some of the marble comes down, but when it's opened, it'll be brand new and really beautiful. It'll be at the highest level," he said.

"The steel will all be checked out because it'll be fully exposed," he said.



President Donald Trump speaks in the Oval Office at the White House, February 2, 2026.

Alex Brandon/AP

He estimated the cost of the renovation at “probably around \$200 million.”

"And, you know, we're fully financed. And so, we're going to close it, and we're going to make it unbelievable, far better than it ever was, and we'll be able to do it properly. I was thinking maybe there's a way of doing it simultaneously, but there really isn't," he said.

Trump said that center would close around July 4, instead of trying to do the renovation around events.

"We can do a much better job, probably, in a way, a faster job in terms, you know, because when you do it piecemeal, for instance, they have a play tonight and you can't do anything. You have to pull out everything, and you can't have stanchions all over the place, and people are walking in to see a play. So, we'll be closing it, sometime around July 4th. It's like we'll close it on July 4th in order to do something great for America, and then we're going to build it," he said.

Trump first announced on Sunday that he wanted to closed the Kennedy Center for "approximately" two years.

He claimed in a post to his social media platform that it's for "Construction, Revitalization, and Complete Rebuilding" into what he called "a new and spectacular Entertainment Complex."

The announcement prompted harsh criticism from several members of the Kennedy family and some Democratic lawmakers.



Donald Trump attends the premiere of the documentary film "Melania" at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., January 29, 2026.

Kevin Lamarque/Reuters

It also marks the latest turn in Trump's takeover of the Washington institution. In February 2025, Trump fired multiple members from the Kennedy Center's Board of Trustees and became its chairman. Several of his administration officials were then installed as board members.

Trump announced in December that the board had voted "unanimously" to add his name to the arts center, with new signage -- "Donald J. Trump and John F. Kennedy Memorial Center for the Performing Arts" appearing on the building's exterior shortly thereafter.

That move has raised several legal questions, with one Democratic lawmaker, Rep. Joyce Beatty, suing the administration for adding his name to the venue without approval from Congress.

Trump's renovation plan is similarly generating pushback from some on Capitol Hill.

Rep. Chellie Pingree, the top Democrat on the panel that oversees funding for the Kennedy Center, told ABC News she is seeking legal guidance on whether President Trump can make the decision to close the performing arts venue without approval from Congress.

"It's a total outrage," she told ABC News in a phone interview. "This is just shutting it down because he has to cover up that he's run the place into the ground."



A view of the Kennedy Center along the Potomac River in Washington, February 2, 2026.

Daniel Slim/AFP via Getty Images

Pingree said Congress has "no idea" how the center is operating, and how they've spent the \$257 million in the president's massive spending and tax package passed by Republicans last year. Originally, the administration gave "some ideas" about plans to replace HVAC systems and backstage equipment, but "we don't know if they've spent all that money to tell you the truth," Pingree said.

Pingree said Democrats will push for more answers about the planned changes and continue to pressure Republicans to join their oversight efforts.

"After seeing what he did to the East Wing I hope some of my colleagues are sufficiently frightened that he will [demolish the existing structure]," she said.

Trump's name added to Kennedy Center signage day after White House announced change →

Beatty, who sits on the Kennedy Board of Trustees as one of its ex-officio members, also issued a statement saying congressional oversight is "essential."

"Once again, Donald Trump has acted with total disregard for Congress. The Kennedy Center is congressionally funded, and Congress should have been consulted on any decision to shut down its operations or undertake major renovations, especially for a two-year period," Beatty said.



The John F. Kennedy Memorial Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, February 2, 2026.

Al Drago/Reuters

Some members of the Kennedy family reacted with dismay after Trump's announcement of a renovation at the venue, which was named by Congress as a "living memorial" to President John F. Kennedy in 1964 after he was assassinated.

Maria Shriver, Kennedy's niece, [wrote on X a satirical 'translation' of Trump's post](#):

"Translation: It has been brought to my attention that due to the name change (but nobody's telling me it's due to the name change), but it's been brought to my attention that entertainers are canceling left and right, and I have determined that since the name change no one wants to perform there any longer... it's best for me to close this center down and rebuild a new center that will bear my name, which will surely get everybody to stop talking about the fact that everybody's canceling... right?"

Since Trump's takeover of the Kennedy Center, several high-profile artists and shows [have canceled appearances](#), including the Broadway show "Hamilton." Opera star Renée Fleming resigned from her role as artistic adviser at large.



A bronze sculpture of President John F. Kennedy is displayed in the John F. Kennedy Memorial Center For The Performing Arts, Feb. 2, 2026 in Washington.

Rahmat Gul/AP

Jack Schlossberg, the grandson of Kennedy, wrote on X, "Trump can take the Kennedy Center for himself. He can change the name, shut the doors, and demolish the building. He

can try to kill JFK. But JFK is kept alive by us now rising up to remove Donald Trump, bring him to justice, and restore the freedoms generations fought for."

Former congressman Joe Kennedy III, a great-nephew of Kennedy, wrote on X, "President John F. Kennedy believed that one day this country would live up to its promise of justice and equal rights for all. For those beliefs and for his sacrifice, Congress voted to make The Kennedy Center a living memorial to him, as a place built by the people for the people to celebrate what connects us. While this trespass on the People's will is painful, President Kennedy would remind us that it is not buildings that define the greatness of a nation. It is the actions of its people and its leaders."

ABC News' Oren Oppenheim, Isabella Murray, Michelle Stoddart, and Karen Travers contributed to this report.

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