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March 31, 2017

Ben Sherwood
Disney Media Networks, Co-Chairman
Disney | ABC Television Group, President
500 South Buena Vista Street
Burbank, California 91521

Stephen B. Burke
NBCUniversal, President & CEO
Comcast Building 30
Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 10112

Leslie Moonves
CBS Corporation, Chairman, President, & CEO
CBS Headquarters
51 W. 52nd Street
New York, NY 10019

Dear Mr. Sherwood, Mr. Burke, Mr. Moonves:

In November, I sent you a letter noting that broadcast news networks – who utilize federal spectrum to conduct their operations – have a moral obligation to provide fair news coverage for the American people. Specifically, I emphasized my extreme concern relating to the network news coverage of the presidential campaign. As you know, the lead up to a presidential election is the most critical time for the American public to receive fair news reporting. Therefore, I request your response to the following questions:

- Do you believe your coverage of Hillary Clinton’s candidacy was as critical as your coverage of Donald Trump’s candidacy?
- Do you believe your network news coverage has the ability to influence the American public?
- Are you aware of any coordination between your news networks and the Hillary Clinton campaign to drive a political narrative favorable to her?

Now that Donald Trump is President, I want to explore your views on how he has been covered by your networks over the past 10 weeks.

- According to an NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey in February, the majority of Americans answered that the “Media has been too critical” of President Donald Trump when asked the question, “Since Donald Trump has won the election, do you think the news media has mostly been fair and objective in their coverage of him or not? And, would you say the news media has been too critical or not critical enough toward Donald Trump in their coverage.”

In light of these results, do you believe your news team adequately reflects the political diversity of the American electorate, with a significant percent of your staff supporting Donald Trump and conservative policies?

- Do your current efforts to aggressively cover the Trump administration match the approach you took in the early days of the Obama administration?
- Given the widespread public perception that the major national news outlets are hostile to conservatives, what actions, if any, do you plan on taking to address this perception?
- When hiring journalists and other members of your news team, is fair reporting taken into account?
- Do your news operations have policies in place to analyze impartiality on news reporting?
- Do you have procedures in place to address reporting that is deemed unfair or biased?
- Numerous polls show the public sees the mainstream media as biased in favor of liberals and against conservatives. Are they wrong? If so, why do they have that misperception?

Lastly, I'd like your feedback on usage of federal spectrum as national broadcasters.

- With your news coverage being delivered over-the-top (OTT) and through video providers, why or why not do you believe federally-allocated spectrum continues to be a necessity for national broadcast networks?

Some may view these questions to be based on conservative viewpoints. They would be right. Half of the American people call themselves conservative, yet a majority of them receive your network news coverage for free, over the airwaves, through federally-allocated spectrum dedicated to national broadcasting. If a majority of Americans are unsatisfied with the fairness of your news coverage, tough questions must be asked of the leaders of those broadcasters. While many may argue that social media and cable news also bear blame for biased news coverage, those companies do not receive federal spectrum as a means to extend their reach to wider swaths of the American public.

The Communications Act of 1934 requires broadcast licenses to operate within the “public interest, convenience, and necessity” of the American people. Your charter to operate within the “public interest” still holds true today and is overseen by Congress and the Federal Communications Commission. As long as you continue to utilize federal spectrum, you have a moral obligation to hold yourselves to a higher standard – one that is viewed by Americans as impartial. I look forward to your response and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you in-person.

Sincerely,



Kevin Cramer
Member of Congress