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CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES  
LOUISE M. SLAUGHTER  
28TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

January 7, 2005

COMMITTEE ON RULES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
LEGISLATIVE AND BUDGET PROCESS  
SELECT COMMITTEE ON  
HOMELAND SECURITY  
CONGRESSIONAL CAUCUS FOR  
WOMEN'S ISSUES  
DEMOCRATIC CO-CHAIR  
CONGRESSIONAL ARTS CAUCUS  
DEMOCRATIC CO-CHAIR  
COMMITTEE ON ORGANIZATION,  
STUDY, AND REVIEW  
WHIP PARLIAMENTARY GROUP  
COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND  
COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Johnathan Rodgers, CEO  
TV One, LLC  
101 Wayne Avenue, 10<sup>th</sup> floor  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

David D. Smith, CEO  
Sinclair Broadcasting Group, Inc.  
10706 Beaver Dam Road  
Hunt Valley, Maryland 21030

Dear Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Smith:

Today, the American public learned from *USA Today* that Armstrong Williams, the syndicated program host on your radio and television stations, received \$240,000 to promote the No Child Left Behind policy of the Bush Administration. In earlier days, this action would have been characterized as "payola." It should still be called a bribe.

With the free broadcast licenses you hold comes an unbreakable obligation to serve the public interest. In fact, the Communications Act of 1934 calls upon the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and broadcast licensees to promote the "public interest"—some 40 times. Simply put, because broadcasters receive free licenses to use the public's airways—estimated to be worth hundreds of billions of dollars—they have an obligation to uphold the public's interest, and to adequately and accurately inform the public about news and opinion.

Mr. Williams clearly breached that implicit contract by not disclosing his monetary gain from influencing the public debate on a matter of national importance. Unless you relieve Mr. Armstrong of his broadcast responsibilities, you will be complicit in that breach of contract and quite possibly, federal law.

The law requires broadcasters to disclose when subject matter is being broadcast "in exchange for money, service or other valuable consideration" (47 U.S.C. § 317). Any individual who accepts payment without making this disclosure violates federal law and is subject to a maximum penalty of \$10,000 in fines and a year in prison (47 U.S.C. § 508).

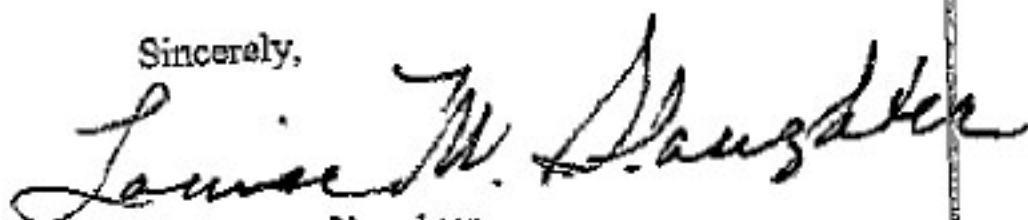
But this issue is greater than a simple legal misstep. The integrity and credibility of our broadcast system is at stake. Had the Fairness Doctrine, which was wrongly rescinded in 1987, still been in place when Mr. Williams "sold his journalistic integrity," at the very least your stations would have been required to balance his one-sided remarks with a diversity of opinions.

Your course should be clear. Remove Mr. Williams from your airwaves immediately; apologize to your listeners and viewers; and institute policies that will ensure not only that this will not happen again, but also that future broadcasts will serve the real public's interest with balance and accuracy.

Our course is also clear. Those of us who are concerned about the lack of fairness in broadcasting today will continue to insist that the FCC serve the public's interest by returning to a standard of balanced content that the public and our democracy deserve.

I look forward to your immediate response on this important matter.

Sincerely,

  
Louise M. Slaughter

Cc: Chairman Michael Powell, Federal Communications Commission