

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

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February 22, 2017

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W. 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

We write to encourage you to take the next steps to increase transparency and accessibility for the online political file information currently required by Commission rules. We have long supported the public's right to know who is paying for the advertisements – such as issues ads – that are pervasive during elections. Additionally, the public should be able to easily access this online information in machine-readable format.


The Media Bureau took initial steps toward the first goal last month when it resolved long-pending complaints against various TV stations regarding the disclosure of required information in the station's political files. We believe that the clarifications released by the Bureau will not only help broadcasters better understand their responsibilities, but will also provide the public with essential information. We were disappointed by your recent decision to set aside the decisions of the Media Bureau, however, we support your call for the full Commission to vote on these clarifications in the near term in order to remove any process concerns.


We also believe that now is the time to move forward on the other issues related to the political file in order for true transparency. We believe that the Commission currently has the authority under the Communications Act to require the disclosure of the specific donors to entities or groups that sponsor issue advertisements. Under current practice, stations are only required to provide a list of the chief executive officers or board of directors for any entity that sponsors an issue ad on the station. Although the Bureau's recent clarifications provide for additional responsibility for stations to seek additional information if not initially provided, a list of officers for an entity does not provide the full picture of who is funding that advertising that is intended to influence the public. This should not be a partisan matter, and we would like to work with you on this issue.

The Commission also can increase the accessibility of the information that is included in the online political file by requiring that all of the data is machine-readable. Currently, the public can only really access information by searching through each station's individual file. Machine-readability is essential to be able to easily aggregate the data. Again, we look forward to working with you to make this a reality for the online political and public files for all broadcast stations.

Sincerely,



Ben Ray Luján
Member of Congress

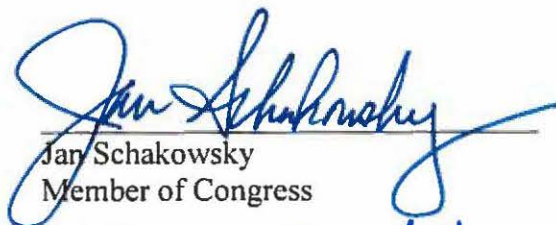

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