



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF THE
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN

June 4, 2021

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2322A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers:

Thank you for your letter regarding the importance of a free and independent press. As you note, I have long advocated for and defended the First Amendment. I also agree with you that protection of free speech, viewpoint diversity, and independent journalism is vital for our democracy. As the Pew Research Center indicated last year, a large portion of Americans still get their news primarily from television or radio programming. Ensuring competition, localism, and diversity in media—and the journalism it fosters—is important. These principles are the basic foundation of all Federal Communications Commission media policies. I wholeheartedly support them. Moreover, studies demonstrate that when local media institutions are strong, our democratic processes thrive.

Your letter also notes my position, as stated in 2011 and 2017, against resurrection of the Fairness Doctrine. As with so many things, I think historical context here matters. The doctrine got its start in the late 1940s and as legal matter only applied to radio and television broadcasters that relied on scarce public spectrum. It was a time when there were just a few channels on the dial and entire communities gathered to hear the day's news. That is not the case today. We can generally see and hear news and information where we want it, when we want it, and from whom we want it. In short, the doctrine was from a different era and never contemplated the vast amount of material available today on cable channels, satellite services, and over the Internet. This means it legally applied only to a small subset of what we consider news and content today. I think this history is necessary to keep in mind.

However, I'll note that in recent times we have seen the effects of division in this country in ways that I never imagined that I would see in my lifetime. Some have expressed frustration with polarizing forces in our society, including the harms of misinformation and disinformation. Others have expressed concern that their viewpoint may be absent from media outlets and that some sources may amplify falsehoods and do genuine harm to individuals and communities.

These are issues that need thoughtful discussion in a modern way. I welcome efforts to have this dialogue. I also remain mindful of the limitations of a doctrine from the 1940s and recognize any effort to update it will require action from Congress. Furthermore, any work to do

so would be constrained by the First Amendment. With respect to proceedings before the Commission, we will continue to be guided by the Constitution in addition to the Communications Act and other applicable statutes, along with the principles of localism, diversity, and competition that have informed our work in this area.

I hope this information is helpful. Please let me know if you have further questions.

Sincerely,

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Jessica Rosenworcel



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
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OFFICE OF THE
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN

June 4, 2021

The Honorable Bob Latta
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
2322A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ranking Member Latta:

Thank you for your letter regarding the importance of a free and independent press. As you note, I have long advocated for and defended the First Amendment. I also agree with you that protection of free speech, viewpoint diversity, and independent journalism is vital for our democracy. As the Pew Research Center indicated last year, a large portion of Americans still get their news primarily from television or radio programming. Ensuring competition, localism, and diversity in media—and the journalism it fosters—is important. These principles are the basic foundation of all Federal Communications Commission media policies. I wholeheartedly support them. Moreover, studies demonstrate that when local media institutions are strong, our democratic processes thrive.

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June 4, 2021

The Honorable Gus Bilirakis
U.S. House of Representatives
2354 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Bilirakis:

Thank you for your letter regarding the importance of a free and independent press. As you note, I have long advocated for and defended the First Amendment. I also agree with you that protection of free speech, viewpoint diversity, and independent journalism is vital for our democracy. As the Pew Research Center indicated last year, a large portion of Americans still get their news primarily from television or radio programming. Ensuring competition, localism, and diversity in media—and the journalism it fosters—is important. These principles are the basic foundation of all Federal Communications Commission media policies. I wholeheartedly support them. Moreover, studies demonstrate that when local media institutions are strong, our democratic processes thrive.

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June 4, 2021

The Honorable Brett Guthrie
U.S. House of Representatives
2434 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Guthrie:

Thank you for your letter regarding the importance of a free and independent press. As you note, I have long advocated for and defended the First Amendment. I also agree with you that protection of free speech, viewpoint diversity, and independent journalism is vital for our democracy. As the Pew Research Center indicated last year, a large portion of Americans still get their news primarily from television or radio programming. Ensuring competition, localism, and diversity in media—and the journalism it fosters—is important. These principles are the basic foundation of all Federal Communications Commission media policies. I wholeheartedly support them. Moreover, studies demonstrate that when local media institutions are strong, our democratic processes thrive.

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June 4, 2021

The Honorable Bill Johnson
U.S. House of Representatives
2336 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Johnson:

Thank you for your letter regarding the importance of a free and independent press. As you note, I have long advocated for and defended the First Amendment. I also agree with you that protection of free speech, viewpoint diversity, and independent journalism is vital for our democracy. As the Pew Research Center indicated last year, a large portion of Americans still get their news primarily from television or radio programming. Ensuring competition, localism, and diversity in media—and the journalism it fosters—is important. These principles are the basic foundation of all Federal Communications Commission media policies. I wholeheartedly support them. Moreover, studies demonstrate that when local media institutions are strong, our democratic processes thrive.

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June 4, 2021

The Honorable Billy Long
U.S. House of Representatives
2454 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Long:

Thank you for your letter regarding the importance of a free and independent press. As you note, I have long advocated for and defended the First Amendment. I also agree with you that protection of free speech, viewpoint diversity, and independent journalism is vital for our democracy. As the Pew Research Center indicated last year, a large portion of Americans still get their news primarily from television or radio programming. Ensuring competition, localism, and diversity in media—and the journalism it fosters—is important. These principles are the basic foundation of all Federal Communications Commission media policies. I wholeheartedly support them. Moreover, studies demonstrate that when local media institutions are strong, our democratic processes thrive.

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June 4, 2021

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
U.S. House of Representatives
2421 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Mullin:

Thank you for your letter regarding the importance of a free and independent press. As you note, I have long advocated for and defended the First Amendment. I also agree with you that protection of free speech, viewpoint diversity, and independent journalism is vital for our democracy. As the Pew Research Center indicated last year, a large portion of Americans still get their news primarily from television or radio programming. Ensuring competition, localism, and diversity in media—and the journalism it fosters—is important. These principles are the basic foundation of all Federal Communications Commission media policies. I wholeheartedly support them. Moreover, studies demonstrate that when local media institutions are strong, our democratic processes thrive.

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June 4, 2021

The Honorable Richard Hudson
U.S. House of Representatives
2112 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Hudson:

Thank you for your letter regarding the importance of a free and independent press. As you note, I have long advocated for and defended the First Amendment. I also agree with you that protection of free speech, viewpoint diversity, and independent journalism is vital for our democracy. As the Pew Research Center indicated last year, a large portion of Americans still get their news primarily from television or radio programming. Ensuring competition, localism, and diversity in media—and the journalism it fosters—is important. These principles are the basic foundation of all Federal Communications Commission media policies. I wholeheartedly support them. Moreover, studies demonstrate that when local media institutions are strong, our democratic processes thrive.

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June 4, 2021

The Honorable Earl L. Carter
U.S. House of Representatives
2432 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Carter:

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June 4, 2021

The Honorable Tim Walberg
U.S. House of Representatives
2266 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Walberg:

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June 4, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Lesko
U.S. House of Representatives
1214 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Lesko:

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June 4, 2021

The Honorable Jeff Duncan
U.S. House of Representatives
2229 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Duncan:

Thank you for your letter regarding the importance of a free and independent press. As you note, I have long advocated for and defended the First Amendment. I also agree with you that protection of free speech, viewpoint diversity, and independent journalism is vital for our democracy. As the Pew Research Center indicated last year, a large portion of Americans still get their news primarily from television or radio programming. Ensuring competition, localism, and diversity in media—and the journalism it fosters—is important. These principles are the basic foundation of all Federal Communications Commission media policies. I wholeheartedly support them. Moreover, studies demonstrate that when local media institutions are strong, our democratic processes thrive.

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The Honorable John R. Curtis
U.S. House of Representatives
2400 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Curtis:

Thank you for your letter regarding the importance of a free and independent press. As you note, I have long advocated for and defended the First Amendment. I also agree with you that protection of free speech, viewpoint diversity, and independent journalism is vital for our democracy. As the Pew Research Center indicated last year, a large portion of Americans still get their news primarily from television or radio programming. Ensuring competition, localism, and diversity in media—and the journalism it fosters—is important. These principles are the basic foundation of all Federal Communications Commission media policies. I wholeheartedly support them. Moreover, studies demonstrate that when local media institutions are strong, our democratic processes thrive.

Your letter also notes my position, as stated in 2011 and 2017, against resurrection of the Fairness Doctrine. As with so many things, I think historical context here matters. The doctrine got its start in the late 1940s and as legal matter only applied to radio and television broadcasters that relied on scarce public spectrum. It was a time when there were just a few channels on the dial and entire communities gathered to hear the day's news. That is not the case today. We can generally see and hear news and information where we want it, when we want it, and from whom we want it. In short, the doctrine was from a different era and never contemplated the vast amount of material available today on cable channels, satellite services, and over the Internet. This means it legally applied only to a small subset of what we consider news and content today. I think this history is necessary to keep in mind.

However, I'll note that in recent times we have seen the effects of division in this country in ways that I never imagined that I would see in my lifetime. Some have expressed frustration with polarizing forces in our society, including the harms of misinformation and disinformation. Others have expressed concern that their viewpoint may be absent from media outlets and that some sources may amplify falsehoods and do genuine harm to individuals and communities.

These are issues that need thoughtful discussion in a modern way. I welcome efforts to have this dialogue. I also remain mindful of the limitations of a doctrine from the 1940s and recognize any effort to update it will require action from Congress. Furthermore, any work to do so would be constrained by the First Amendment. With respect to proceedings before the Commission, we will continue to be guided by the Constitution in addition to the

Communications Act and other applicable statutes, along with the principles of localism, diversity, and competition that have informed our work in this area.

I hope this information is helpful. Please let me know if you have further questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jessica Rosenworcel", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jessica Rosenworcel