

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

Re: *Sponsorship Identification Requirements for Foreign Government-Provided Programming*, MB Docket No. 20-299.

As early as 2017, stories began to surface about programming from foreign state-controlled media being aired on U.S. broadcast stations in cities like Kansas City and Washington D.C. As reports increased about the use of leasing agreements to broadcast foreign government programming without disclosing the source of that programming, I became alarmed. It appeared that fundamental notions of transparency—core to our regulations in this space—were being disregarded, resulting in audiences failing to know who was speaking to them. I joined several other voices in calling for investigation and, if necessary, regulatory action to ensure that our sponsorship ID rules require source identification when programming on U.S. airwaves is provided or paid for by a foreign governmental entity.

The fact of the matter is that these sponsorship ID rules were last updated in 1963. I am pleased with today's modern update, as this item closes identified loopholes that have allowed foreign government-sponsored programming to reach American audiences without notice of its true source of origin. The public has a right to know the identity of those using the public airwaves to inform, persuade, or solicit support; otherwise, the public is missing a crucial piece of the puzzle that informs their decision-making and helps in assessing the truth of what they see and hear.

The rules we adopt today require broadcasters to make specific disclosures at reasonable intervals when airing material provided or sponsored by foreign governmental entities pursuant to a leasing agreement. By narrowing the scope to leasing agreements, we focus this action to known sources of the unattributed programming.

The rules we adopt today also are reasonably tailored to minimize the burden on broadcast licensees. Given the stakes, we aim to ensure that *all* foreign government-sponsored broadcasts are properly identified as such. It is therefore reasonable to require *every* licensee that leases airtime under the circumstances described herein to exercise reasonable diligence by independently determining whether a foreign government is the source of leased programming.

After careful review of recent filings in the record, we determined that reasonable diligence should still require a search of two readily-accessible, government-provided sources—the Department of Justice's FARA website and the Commission's semi-annual U.S.-based foreign media outlets reports. However, after hearing from commenters that requiring licensees also to perform "unbounded" internet searches of lessees' names would be overly burdensome, we eliminated that requirement. I support this and other minor modifications to the rules as put forth in the circulated version of this item because they are informed by the record, which is precisely how the rulemaking process should work.

I want to thank the Commission staff, especially those in the Media and Enforcement Bureaus, and the Office of General Counsel, for their very thoughtful work on this important item.