



November 2, 2017

The Honorable Ajit V. Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

RE: Public Notice, Media Bureau Establishes Pleading Cycle for Applications to Transfer Control of Tribune Media Company to Sinclair Broadcast Group, Inc. and Permit-But-Disclose Ex Parte Status for the Proceeding, MB Docket No. 17-179

Dear Chairman Pai:

RIDE TV writes to express its concern regarding the proposed merger of Sinclair and Tribune.

RIDE TV is a 24-hour, high-definition, independent television network based in Texas that is dedicated to the 30 million Americans who ride horses. RIDE TV provides an entertaining mix of reality shows, equine event coverage, inspiring documentaries, cooking demonstrations, children's programs, and more. Our unique programming features celebrities, champions and the personalities at the heart of America's horse culture. Horse enthusiasts include ranchers, children, and even our nation's President.

The Sinclair/Tribune merger poses a clear threat to independent networks like RIDE TV and their viewers.

Choice is a governing principle in the business community that runs strong across RIDE TV's home state of Texas, and should remain a basic right in the media realm. Part of what makes working in business – whether as an entrepreneur or a consumer – so rewarding is choice. As an entrepreneur, choice means healthy competition; as a consumer, it means options and an increased likelihood that you get what you're looking for. The Sinclair/Tribune merger would limit both programming competition and consumer choice.

Sinclair is already the nation's largest television group owner. If the transaction is approved, it would become an industry behemoth, reaching 72% of U.S. households, operating 233 local broadcast stations (80 more than its nearest competitor), and broadcasting in 106 local markets. Sinclair's increased leverage would enable it to make greater demands on MVPD resources, including more bandwidth and carriage fees for Sinclair's affiliated cable networks, multicast broadcast signals, and duplicative ATSC 3.0 broadcast signals. This would have the effect of crowding out independent networks like RIDE TV from MVPDs' lineups and draining

license fees that could otherwise be used for such networks. The merger would also harm consumers by providing them with fewer programming choices at a higher cost.¹

Sinclair's claimed benefits of the transaction do not hold water. Sinclair has said the transaction will enable it to invest in local news, but its previous actions and statements belie this claim. Sinclair has a reputation for slashing budgets and downsizing newsrooms, and has made clear it expects to achieve similar "synergies" from this transaction.² In fact, CEO Chris Ripley has noted he intends to save at least \$100 million from merging facilities and staffs at acquired stations.³ Local news and information are of particular importance to individuals and small businesses in rural areas, like the equestrian business. RIDE TV and its viewers are wary of the news monopoly the transaction would create and concerned that the proposed transaction would cause a wave of further industry consolidation, undermining localism and programming diversity. RIDE TV enjoys strategic alliances with the National Cutting Horse Association, American Paint Horse Association, American Quarter Horse Association and many other industry associations, and there is widespread grassroots opposition to this merger.

Moreover, Sinclair has ignored the FCC's requests for specific information regarding steps it intends to take to comply with the ownership rules, including any divestiture plans,⁴ depriving the public and the FCC of the opportunity to examine the transaction fully. Given the potential negative effects of the transaction on small businesses, independent networks, and consumers, the FCC should not rush to judgment without this critical information. Moreover, to the extent Sinclair seeks to avail itself of any changes in the FCC's broadcast ownership rules, the FCC should require Sinclair to refile its application and should establish a new pleading cycle for any such application.

Texas media has already raised flags regarding this merger. A recent column in the Port Arthur News explained how if this deal goes through, "local television is likely to get more partisan and a whole lot less local. This should be alarming to everyone. . . . That may be great for Sinclair, but it hardly seems like a good deal for the rest of us."⁵ Likewise, the editorial

¹ Independent programmers and others have explained that the transaction would result in higher retransmission consent and other licensing fees for MVPDs, which will be passed along to MVPD customers as higher service fees. *See, e.g., Cinemoui et al. Comments at 7-9 & n. 21; NCTA Reply Comments at 6-7; Dish Petition at 21-31.* Sinclair itself has promised to raise retransmission consent fees following consummation of the merger. *See Sinclair Broadcast Group, Investor Presentation at Slide 7 (May 8, 2017), http://sbgnet.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Sinclair_Tribune-Media-Investor-Presentation_vF.pdf.*

² *Cinemoui et al. Comments at 11-13.*

³ *See e.g., Sinclair Broadcast Group Inc., Conference Call to Discuss its Definitive Agreement to Acquire Tribune Media Company, May 8, 2017 (3:00PM GMT); Sinclair Broadcast Group Inc., Investor Presentation (May 8, 2017), http://sbgnet.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Sinclair_Tribune-Media-Investor-Presentation_vF.pdf; Sinclair Broadcast Group Inc., Registration Statement (Form S-4) at 68-72 (June 30, 2017).*

⁴ *See Sinclair Response to Request for Information (filed Oct. 5, 2017).*

⁵ *See Jesse Wright, Local Coverage Faces Threats Thanks to FCC, Port Arthur News, Oct. 31, 2017, <http://www.panews.com/2017/10/31/local-coverage-faces-threats-thanks-to-fcc/>.*

board of the Amarillo Globe-News explained: “A recent federal decision to do away with a decades-old rule aimed at making broadcasters keep a local presence in media markets will allow for major changes to what local residents see and hear on Amarillo TV and radio stations. . . . They also say it will be a boon for the Sinclair Broadcast Group, which was among the local television station owners who pushed for the rule’s elimination.”⁶

In Texas, we value our independence and local control. This merger threatens those values. We must protect our strong, independent, and local media. We believe this merger deserves more scrutiny from Congress, the FCC, the United States Department of Justice, and other parties. We urge you to oppose the Sinclair/Tribune merger and suggest you also review how changes in the media ownership rules would impact media in Texas and across the country.

Respectfully submitted,



Michael Fletcher
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RIDE Television Network
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cc:

Sen. John Thune
Sen. Bill Nelson
Sen. Charles Grassley
Sen. Dianne Feinstein
Rep. Greg Walden
Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr.
Rep. Bob Goodlatte
Rep. John Conyers, Jr.

⁶ See Jay Ricci, *FCC Allows Stations to Take “Local” Out of News*, Amarillo Globe-News, Oct. 28, 2017, <http://amarillo.com/business/news/local-news/2017-10-25/fcc-allows-stations-take-local-out-news>.