

As the former writer of the New York Jerry Lewis Telethon for 10 years (retired in 1999), I take a great interest in how public airwaves are used to serve the public interest. That's why it's appalling to me that Sinclair Broadcasting is forcing their stations to air a partisan anti-Kerry documentary days before the election.

Of course, I operated as an independent contractor, and my views do NOT in any way reflect those of the Muscular Dystrophy Association. In fact, politics had nothing to do with MDA, which is why the telethon was such a great show-- conservatives, liberals, and independents, unions, above and below the line staff all worked together for a common cause.

In contrast, what Sinclair is doing is a blatant abuse of power, and a shocking example of why media consolidation is not working. This is a real problem for me for business reasons as much as political ones. The fact is, as most industry professionals know, propaganda is simply bad television-- and it's being rammed down a lot of people's throats by a company that has access to public airwaves free of charge.

Sinclair's hit piece on Kerry will, very likely, not bring royalties, residuals, or points to American writers, production staff, or talent. It will go nowhere in syndication, and it doesn't help revive the dying audience for television in this country. In fact, it's just going to make more people both here and abroad more cynical about television as a medium. The industry needs quality programming, both in the private and public sectors. In fact, I'm very much afraid that American television is in very, very deep trouble-- and Sinclair isn't helping. Big media conglomerates like Sinclair aren't just part of the problem, they ARE the problem.

Some of the form letters you'll get on this issue say that large companies only care about what's good for the bottom line. What I'm suggesting is exactly the opposite-- big companies like Sinclair have no clue what's best for their bottom line, or what's best for the industry.

That's why I'm hoping that when it comes time to renew Sinclair's license, the FCC takes a good, hard look at the impact of Sinclair's programming on the long term prospects of the American entertainment industry. No matter which way the political wind is blowing, I think what Sinclair is doing hurts all of us.