



**FCC Testimony
October 3, 2006
Los Angeles, California**

**Alan Rosenberg
President, Screen Actors Guild**

Good afternoon, and thank you Chairman Martin and Commissioners for holding this important discussion today, here in the heart of the entertainment community. My name is Alan Rosenberg and I am the President of Screen Actors Guild. I represent 120,000 actors, and we are proud to be affiliated with the AFL-CIO. It is with great pride that I introduce the woman who will be speaking on behalf of the Guild today. An accomplished actor and union leader, Screen Actors Guild National First Vice President, Ms. Anne-Marie Johnson.

**Anne-Marie Johnson
National First Vice President, Screen Actors Guild**

Thank you Alan, Mr. Chairman, and Commissioners. I am honored to be here today.

Though I have been in movies and worked on the stage, I *am a television actor*. I have been blessed with several TV series over the years and I've watched the changes in the television landscape carefully, and cautiously. As actors, we were lucky if we were hired by one of television's most acclaimed independent producers.

However, the days of an independent producer taking his or her creative vision of a series or movie of the week to fruition is a thing of the past. But casting decisions are now made by the networks, and not just for the marquee stars. Big media companies now cast almost every actor, because they can. Norman Lear fought to have Carroll O'Connor play his vision of Archie Bunker, Steve Cannell knew James Garner *had* to be Jim Rockford and Marcy Carsey *knew* Bill Cosby's character in *The Cosby Show* had to be a doctor.

Until they fell in love with the Huxtable family, many Americans never saw an African American man as a doctor. When the show was originally pitched to ABC, the network executives wanted Bill Cosby's character to be a Vegas entertainer rather than a doctor.

When Marcy Carsey refused to make this creative concession, she was forced to take the show to NBC, and the rest is history.

This is a golden example of what can happen when there is true diversity of viewpoints in the production of prime-time network television programming. Query whether American viewers would have ever seen an African-American doctor on prime-time television if it had not been for the perseverance of this independent producer. And this is why a requirement for independent voices in production is critical to the Commission's long-standing goal of ensuring viewpoint diversity in America.

American viewers embraced those, and dozens of other cutting-edge, provocative characters in the 1970s and 80s. These shows were wildly successful and became a part of American popular culture. Some amazing producers, writers, directors and actors, broke the mold and made worldwide viewers think about social issues in ways they never had before

There are certainly some excellent shows on the air today. I, for one, celebrate the resurgence of ensemble casts in today's hit shows—it's great news for SAG actors when they get jobs instead of reality show contestants. But doesn't the public deserve the pre-1992 level of creative, independent sources for programming? Since the repeal of the FCC financial interest and syndication rules, the networks have engaged in unprecedented vertical integration with movie studios and production companies.

Due to this vertical integration, independent producers who traditionally created network programming have essentially been shut out of the primetime network equation. Accordingly, we think the FCC, as custodians of the public's airwaves, should require that 25% of all primetime network programming hours be provided by true independent producers--not the networks. Producers who are stakeholders and risk takers should be rewarded when their creative vision results in successful returns.

As actors, we find the continued consolidation of media companies has drastically limited our ability to individually bargain our personal services agreements. Every working actor has a "quote," the amount of money you get for a guest starring role, etc. It's each actor's "market value." There is no such thing as getting your quote anymore. Like the oligarchy that they are, the networks decide what the top-of-show rates are, in a parallel practice. Some networks will even tell you they only pay 50% of going rate. Take it or leave it. This salary compression cripples the middle class actors' ability to make a living.

As a union, and a vital part of the American labor movement, we are gravely concerned that the continued consolidation of our employers will result in the exclusion of the issues and challenges facing workers. If Screen Actors Guild is involved in a labor dispute with the networks, and I certainly hope we aren't, whose story will be told over the airwaves? Will the 6 o'clock news include our perspective, or that of those who have an economic stake in seeing us fail?

Screen Actors Guild believes that the public deserves so much more than sanitized programming and news. The American viewing public deserves diversity, competition and localism in programming. Consequently, we urge you to enact a 25 % independent production requirement on primetime network broadcasts.

About SAG

Screen Actors Guild is the nation's largest labor union representing working actors. Established in 1933, SAG has a rich history in the American labor movement, from standing up to studios to break long-term engagement contracts in the 1940s to fighting for artists' rights amid the digital revolution sweeping the entertainment industry in the 21st century. With 20 branches nationwide, SAG represents nearly 120,000 working actors in film, television, industrials, commercials, video games, music videos and other new media. The Guild exists to enhance actors' working conditions, compensation and benefits and to be a powerful, unified voice on behalf of artists' rights. SAG is a proud affiliate of the AFL-CIO. Headquartered in Los Angeles, you can visit SAG online at www.sag.org.