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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
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March 14, 2005

The Honorable Michael K. Powell
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

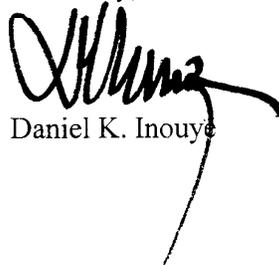
Dear Chairman Powell:

I write to express my concern about recent press reports detailing the alarming practice of some broadcast stations who edit and air government-created "video new releases" (VNRs) without attribution. As described in recent investigations by the General Accounting Office, VNRs are generally produced to mimic traditional news segments and include a suggested script, video clips, and other promotional materials. Until now, attention has largely focused on whether certain VNRs created by the federal government violated the restriction on using appropriated funds for publicity or propaganda. However, equally as serious is growing evidence that certain broadcasters are editing government-created VNRs to make it appear as if such information is the result of independent news-gathering.

Not only does this lack of disclosure represent a serious breach of journalistic ethics, but it also seems to violate FCC rules requiring attribution for the airing of "any political broadcast matter" or "the discussion of a controversial issue of public importance." Moreover, additional scrutiny may be necessary to determine whether these practices also violate the Communications Act's prohibition against a station's acceptance of "money, service, or other valuable consideration" for the airing of content.

In light of these troubling developments, the Commission should move swiftly to investigate this matter fully and to take any remedial measures necessary to prevent station owners from misleading their viewers.

Sincerely,



Daniel K. Inoué

cc: The Honorable Commissioner Kathleen Abernathy
cc: The Honorable Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein
cc: The Honorable Commissioner Michael Copps
cc: The Honorable Commissioner Kevin Martin