

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 23, 2004

Mr. Leslie Moonves  
President and CEO  
CBS Television  
51 West 52nd Street  
New York, NY 10019

Dear Mr. Moonves:

We are writing to express our concerns about the decision of Viacom's CBS television network to deny MoveOn.org paid airtime during this year's Super Bowl. We believe this action sends a negative message to the American people about your network's commitment to preserving our democratic debate. Censoring this ad is an affront to free speech and an obstruction of the public's right to hear a diversity of voices over the public airwaves.

CBS has said that the ad violated the network's policy against running issue advocacy advertising. However, the network has run a White House issue advocacy spot on the consequences of drug use during a past Super Bowl. CBS also will air a spot by Philip Morris USA and the American Legacy Foundation advocating against smoking during this year's Super Bowl. Additionally, the network profits enormously from the thousands of issue ads which air on CBS stations nationwide during election campaigns year after year. Because of these facts, we must call into question why CBS refuses the advertisement by MoveOn.org.

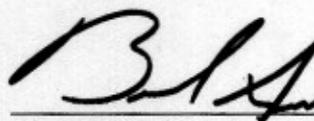
Issue ads are commonplace and important for democratic debate. Yet, CBS seems to want to limit that debate to ads that are not critical of the political status quo, and in the case of the MoveOn ad, of the President and by extension the Republican-controlled Congress. Apparently, CBS feels that the topic covered in this paid advertisement -the federal government's budget crisis-is inappropriate or irrelevant for American viewers, despite being one of the most critical issues of our day.

The choice not to run this paid advertisement appears to be part of a disturbing pattern on CBS's part to bow to the wishes of the Republican National Committee. We remember well CBS's remarkable decision this fall to self-censor at the direction of GOP pressure. The network shamefully cancelled a broadcast about former President Ronald Reagan which Republican partisans considered insufficiently flattering.

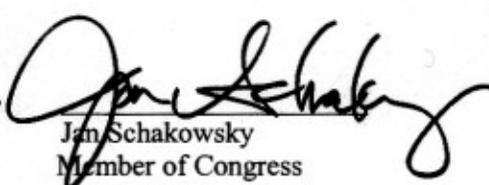
Perhaps not coincidentally, CBS's decision to censor the Reagan program and to deny airtime to this commercial comes at a time when the White House and the Republican Congress are pushing to allow even greater and greater media concentration - a development from which Viacom stands to benefit handsomely. The appearance of a conflict is hard to ignore. There may not be a fire here, but there certainly is a great deal of smoke.

As Members of Congress, it is our responsibility to point out the negative direction in which we see CBS heading. You have been entrusted by the American people as stewards of the public airwaves. We ask that you not violate that trust and that you not censor this ad.

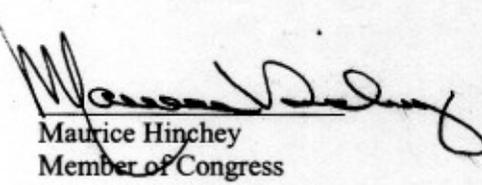
Sincerely,



Bernard Sanders  
Member of Congress



Jim Schakowsky  
Member of Congress



Maurice Hinchey  
Member of Congress

cc: Sumner M. Redstone, Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer, Viacom

Shane E. Watson

John W. Oliver

Dee Buchanan

Marcy Kaptin

George Miller

Judd Keller

Tammy Baldwin

Major R. Chan

Joe P. Serrano

Rail M. Spindler

Bob Filner

Louisa M. Slaughter

Lynn Woodsey

Russell Brown

J. Smith

Barbara Lee

Robert Weyler

Dennis J. Kucinich

Bruce Baird

Ben M. Thompson

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Sam Farr

Peter deFazio

Pete Stark

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