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before the

Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection,
Committee on Energy and Commerce

"From Imus to Industry: The Business of Stereotypes and Degrading Images"

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Thank you Chairman Rush and Ranking Member Stearns for inviting me to participate in today's hearing on an issue of personal importance to you Mr. Chairman . . . our industry and society as a whole.

Our iconic brands are known across the globe, connecting with audiences through nearly 140 locally programmed and operated television channels and over 280 websites – reaching more than 500 million households worldwide in 160 countries and 32 languages. Brands that include: MTV, VH1, CMT, Comedy Central, Nickelodeon, Spike, Logo and BET, not to mention Paramount Pictures, which produces and distributes motion pictures across the globe.

These brands are home to some of the entertainment industry's most creatively brilliant minds. And I firmly believe that the success and unparalleled influence of our entertainment brands is driven by the creative control and freedom we provide to our divisional and channel executives.

The practical result of this independence is that programming choices are made by people whose job it is to know their audiences intimately and who can deliver entertainment that is compelling, engaging and authentic. The other practical result is that my testimony today is likely to end-up as fodder for parody on *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart or *The Colbert Report*. And as you all know, these often hilarious and sometimes biting shows are a far cry from C-SPAN.

When it comes to who runs our largest programming divisions, Viacom has two of the best, most experienced, and well-respected leaders in the business . . . Judy McGrath, Chairman & CEO of MTV Networks, and a 20 year veteran of the company; and Debra Lee -- who has spent the past two decades at BET Networks and today serves as its Chairman & CEO.

Each a trailblazer in her own right, Judy and Debra oversee diverse and talented executive teams that are the day-to-day stewards shaping the content on our channels. Collectively, they oversee the development of literally thousands of hours of programming a week. I am proud of them and their work.

As a company, but more importantly as a collection of individuals who work for Viacom and its entertainment brands, we understand that with influence comes responsibility. And we take our responsibilities seriously.

We have a responsibility to entertain. If we fail to fulfill this most basic responsibility, we don't HAVE a business.

We have a responsibility to speak authentically to our viewers – Our entertainment has to engage the audience. Believe me, that is no simple task when you consider the amazing demographic diversity of the core audiences that our brands reach. To put it in more familiar political terms, our channels must speak to:

red, blue and purple states;

to boomers as well as generation x . . . y . . . and next;

to progressives and conservatives – and everyone in between;

to working families, the middle class, and the wealthy;

to parents and children; and

to people of all racial, religious, and ethnic backgrounds.

Even more challenging, perhaps, is the fact that none of these distinct audiences is monolithic. That's why we spend a lot of time, effort and money researching what our audiences want. We understand that a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all approach cannot succeed.

That explains why *Juvies,"* a real-life portrayal of the juvenile criminal justice system, aired on MTV along side *"The Hills,"* a show about affluent young adults living the good life in Los Angeles. While on BET, you'll see *"Sunday Best"*, a search for the next great gospel singer, as well as *Baldwin Hills*, a reality series focused on the lives of upper-middle class African American high school students.

Although distinctly different, each show connects to its audience in an honest and authentic way.

But not every show or channel is for every audience. What's appropriate for primetime on VH1 is not meant for after-school viewing on Nickelodeon. And some things aren't appropriate FOR ANY OF OUR CHANNELS.

We have Standards and Practices that govern all of our programming, and every show and EVERY music video are reviewed by a diverse group of employees before they air on one of our networks. We also have guidelines that prohibit certain words and imagery in the music videos aired on our channels.

We play no role in producing or creating the videos – that's the exclusive purview of the artists and record labels. We do, however, take a very pro-active role in editing music videos, which is why you won't hear the "B" word or "H" word or "N" word in any of our music videos . . . nor will you see gang symbols or portrayals of violence and drug use. Although we take our standards and practices role seriously, we also believe that it is not our role to censor the creative expression of artists whose music often reflects the pain they've suffered or seen in their lives and communities.

Once we have ensured that programming meets our standards, it receives a rating – because of their abbreviated length, videos are rated in blocks. Parents and viewers can then rely upon these ratings to make informed decisions and use existing technology to block programming they don't want . . . or choose the old fashioned method and simply turn off the TV.

As elected officials, you know all too well that with different and sometimes conflicting interests can come controversy. And when you add creativity and artistic expression into the mix, consensus can become even more elusive.

What some find funny, others find tasteless. What is wildly popular within one demographic, may be viewed as insensitive or offensive to another. And what qualifies as artistic excellence to some may seem amateurish to others. Entertainment has never been – nor ever will be – about reaching consensus . . . particularly for a nation as diverse as ours.

Millions of viewers every day choose to tune into our programming or change the channel in search of something different. Creativity demands that we take chances. But we must balance that risk-taking with a responsibility to our audience and society as a whole . . . and we do.

Rather than stifling creativity in pursuit of consensus, we seek balance – a balance of content that entertains, reflects and speaks to the full spectrum of our diverse audiences' interests.

That brings me to an equally important responsibility: the responsibility to engage, educate and empower our viewers, particularly young people. We continually strive to make a positive difference in their lives and our world. This commitment is part of our DNA . . . and I am proud to say, we do it very well. Some of our most successful efforts include:

- Viacom's groundbreaking worldwide KNOW HIV/AIDS initiative;
- BET Foundation's "Healthy" Camp for Girls, which promotes healthier lifestyles through health literacy, nutrition, fitness, exercise, positive thinking, and personal responsibility;
- MTV's award-winning "Choose or Lose" Presidential election coverage;
- VH1's Save the Music Foundation, which just celebrated its 10th anniversary;
- BET's HIV/AIDS "Rap it Up" campaign;
- mtvU's fight to raise awareness about the genocide in Darfur; and
- an exciting new venture Think.MTV, an online social-networking site designed to encourage and enable young people to get involved in public service, which launched last week with the generous support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, among others.

Finally, we have a responsibility to listen to both fans and critics, and engage in a constructive dialogue that will help us fulfill all of these missions.

That's why I'm here today.

And we don't just listen to our audiences and our critics; we take it a step further and provide a platform for their voices to be heard. That's why tonight BET will premiere the first of a three-part news special, *Hip Hop vs. America* . . . a wide-ranging, insightful, and perhaps controversial, discussion about the impact of hip-hop on our culture.

For nearly three decades, Viacom has created compelling, entertaining and, yes, sometimes controversial programming. But as you'll see in this clip from *Hip Hop vs. America*, we intend to continue to engage our audiences in a productive dialogue and create programming that reflects our dynamic popular culture.

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