



Durbin questions Sinclair Broadcasting dictating content to local news stations

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WASHINGTON - U.S. Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) today called on Sinclair Broadcasting Group Executive Chairman David Smith to explain his company's policy regarding mandating content for local news stations, as well as whether employment consequences exist for local news anchors who do not deliver scripted content from the broadcasting giant.

A recent report showing local news anchors reading the same script verbatim continues the troubling history of Sinclair dictating content to its stations, including mandating they run Sinclair-produced segments. Recent reporting also suggests that there are contractual penalties for Sinclair-owned stations and employees that refuse to run Sinclair-produced mandated content.

"This practice not only compromises the ability of local reporters to serve the unique interests of their viewers, but it undercuts the journalistic integrity of local news anchors who are required to deliver corporate-scripted messages, at times without providing a disclaimer of their source," wrote Durbin. "Not only is this practice concerning, it contradicts representations of Sinclair's policies made to my staff by Sinclair's Senior Vice President/Strategy and Policy in a November 2017 meeting. In response to concerns raised by my staff about the consequences of Sinclair-mandated programming on local reporting, Sinclair representatives repeatedly represented that Sinclair does not dictate the words or content local reporters deliver and that any national content distributed on Sinclair-owned stations is delivered by an identified national correspondent."

Full text of Durbin's letter is available below:

April 4, 2018

David D. Smith

Executive Chairman

Sinclair Broadcast Group, Inc.

10706 Beaver Dam Road

Hunt Valley, Maryland 21030

Dear Mr. Smith:

I write with concerns following Sinclair Broadcast Group's (Sinclair) decision to require local news anchors at Sinclair-owned stations to deliver a scripted promotional message on-air. This most recent incident continues the troubling history of Sinclair dictating content to its stations, including mandating they run Sinclair-produced segments. This practice not only compromises the ability of local reporters to serve the unique interests of their viewers, but it undercuts the journalistic integrity of local news anchors who are required to deliver corporate-scripted messages, at times without providing a disclaimer of their source.

Not only is this practice concerning, it contradicts representations of Sinclair's policies made to my staff by Sinclair's Senior Vice President/Strategy and Policy in a November 2017 meeting. In response to concerns raised by my staff about the consequences of Sinclair-mandated programming on local reporting, Sinclair representatives repeatedly represented that Sinclair does not dictate the words or content local reporters deliver and that any national content distributed on Sinclair-owned stations is delivered by an identified national correspondent. The requirement that local news anchors deliver a scripted promotional message on-air is inconsistent with those representations.

Further troubling, is recent reporting that there are contractual penalties for Sinclair-owned stations and employees that refuse to run Sinclair-produced mandated content.

Please confirm what Sinclair's policy is regarding Sinclair-produced mandated content for local news anchors. Further, please clarify whether there will be employment consequences for personnel at local stations who refuse to deliver the scripted promotional message.

I look forward to your thorough and prompt response.

Sincerely,

RICHARD J. DURBIN

United States Senator