

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 3, 2017

The Honorable Ajit Pai, Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Pai,

It is a fundamental principle in the American broadcast system that the public has a right to know who is behind programming on our public airwaves that is designed to persuade them. This principle is embodied in the sponsorship identification requirements of the Communications Act of 1934 and the associated regulations of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).¹ We write today to inquire whether the FCC's sponsorship identification and public file ownership disclosure requirements should be applied to foreign state-sponsored broadcast content, such as RT (formerly Russia Today), which U.S. intelligence agencies have determined was used in an effort to influence the American public in our national elections.

Intelligence agencies have been clear about the role RT played in the U.S election. In a declassified report from January, 2017, the Director of National Intelligence referred to RT as "[t]he Kremlin's principal international propaganda outlet."² The report also notes the lengths to which RT has worked to obscure its ties to the Russian government, including changing its name from "Russia Today" to "RT" in 2008 in an effort to "stop scaring away the audience."³ Given RT's efforts to hide its true intentions, we believe it is critical for the American people to have a clearer picture of the true source of this channel's programming.

As staunch defenders of the First Amendment, we are not suggesting that any broadcast speech should be suppressed, but the airwaves are a public trust that have always carried with them special obligations to the public with respect to content broadcast over them. Sponsorship identification is one of those special obligations which extends back to the earliest days of broadcast regulation in the United States.⁴ Requiring broadcasters to maintain a public inspection file with information like ownership data goes back more than forty years.⁵ With RT broadcasting over-the-air in certain markets, we ask whether you believe the FCC's rules should be applied to foreign state-sponsored channels. The American people deserve to know who is attempting to influence them.

¹ 47 U.S.C. § 317 and 47 C.F.R § 73.1212.

² Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections": *The Analytic Process and Cyber Incident Attribution*, at 4, January 6, 2017. Hereinafter the ODNI Report.

³ ODNI Report at 12.

⁴ See § 19 of the Radio Act of 1927.

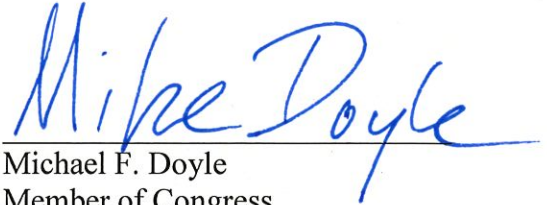
⁵ See 47 C.F.R. § 73.3526; <https://publicfiles.fcc.gov/>

Thank you for your attention to this important inquiry and we look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



Michael F. Doyle
Member of Congress



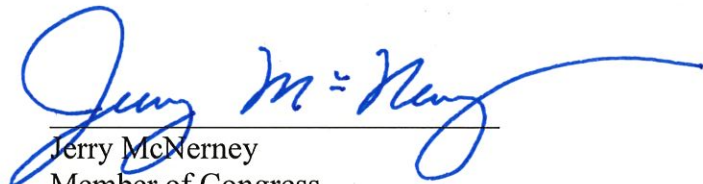
David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



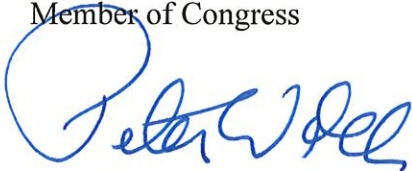
Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress



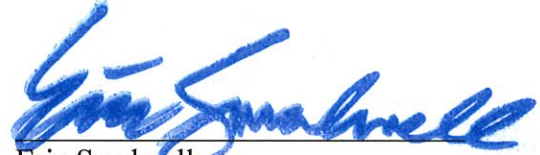
Mark Takano
Member of Congress



Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



Peter Welch
Member of Congress



Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress



David Loeback
Member of Congress