

**Hearing on**  
**“TV Timeout: Understanding Sports Media Rights”**

**United States House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Energy and Commerce**

***Subcommittee on Communications and Technology***

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**Statement of Brian Lawlor**  
**President, Scripps Sports**

Good morning, Chairman Latta, Ranking Member Matsui and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to testify before you today. My name is Brian Lawlor, and I am the president of Scripps Sports, part of the E.W. Scripps Company. For fourteen years prior to stepping into this role at the end of 2022, I led the Scripps Local Media division portfolio of local TV stations which includes three markets in Michigan including Detroit, five markets in Florida including Tampa and Tallahassee, three markets in California, Cleveland where our company was started and Cincinnati where we are now headquartered, among many others. We also have local TV stations in Bakersfield, Boise, Salt Lake City and Waco.

From the company's inception 145 years ago, Scripps has always believed strongly in our duty to serve communities, most notably with our quality, objective local journalism. Since 1923, Scripps's news operations have followed a simple, but powerful credo to guide our army of local journalists around the country: "Give light and the people will find their own way." Today, our local broadcast stations and national networks together reach nearly every American household – with 62 local TV stations in 43 markets, serving 71 million monthly viewers – and seven national networks including news outlets Court TV and Scripps News, and entertainment brands ION, Bounce, Grit, Laff and ION Mystery. American viewers can find all of our brands over the air for free, and on numerous cable, satellite, digital, and streaming platforms.

Building on our rich history in local broadcasting and wide reach, in December 2022, Scripps launched a standalone sports division, Scripps Sports. Scripps Sports uses our local markets and national broadcast networks to provide professional and

college sports teams, leagues and conferences the ability to reach their fans more directly and more broadly.

During this first year of Scripps Sports, the people have found their way to our free, over-the-air local and national sports offerings. In just twelve short months, we have achieved a series of notable successes for sports fans and viewers around the country, with a particular focus on advancing and growing women's sports:

- In a landmark deal with the WNBA last year, we responded to the exploding interest in women's basketball, becoming that league's first partner to create a national franchise night each week of the WNBA season. This move has created "appointment viewing" fans, much like that which already exists for many men's sports. Last year, we broadcast 44 national and regional WNBA games on our ION network, which is available free, over the air to viewers. This year, we will add a national studio show to showcase the league and its amazing athletes similar to how the NBA or NFL are presented on other networks.
- We entered into an agreement with the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) that features a weekly, nationally available doubleheader every Saturday night of the season. Over the course of the season, Scripps Sports will be televising 50 women's soccer matches nationally on ION, significantly increasing the profile and reach of professional women's soccer in the United States.
- We also secured an agreement with the NHL's reigning Stanley Cup-champion Vegas Golden Knights to air their games on our independent station in Las Vegas, KMCC, which also carries local news and entertainment. As Knights

president Kerry Bubolz has stated, the Scripps deal has “allowed more of our fans to access our games on TV than ever before.”

- In Phoenix, we are in the middle of our first season with that city’s NHL franchise, the Arizona Coyotes, and will air 81 out of 82 of this season’s games to local fans on our over-the-air stations in Phoenix and Tucson.
- Scripps Sports also has the rights to the NCAA’s Big Sky Conference, making available college football and basketball games that would normally not be distributed on broadcast TV in the markets throughout Montana, Utah, Idaho and others. The power of the over-the-air broadcast platform is never more obvious than during the annual University of Montana versus Montana State football game, which airs on Scripps local TV stations through our five markets in Montana. Across the state, the lowest rating in any market was a 31 household rating, meaning that 31 percent of all the TV households in the Bozeman Montana TV market watched that football game on broadcast TV – and all the other Montana markets exceeded that.

We are living through a rapidly shifting media marketplace. Americans are cutting the traditional pay TV cord and moving more toward alternative services. While sports on pay platforms is not a new phenomenon, the trend of removing sports from those stations available to all viewers and toward airing only on paid services has been met with significant fan objections, as we’ve seen most recently when the NFL and NCAA shifted some of their airings to streaming. This has made it difficult for fans to watch in many cases – either through difficulty finding the games or the expense or logistical

challenges of the streaming option. Sports that used to be available to all are now sometimes aired by platforms without connections to local communities, and fans who can't pay get locked out. This all comes at the detriment of local sports, whose frustrated fanbases are unable to watch their teams compete. Our goal is to serve fans, and we can only do so if broadcast stations are part of the equation. More than 20 percent of Scripps households now receive our stations through cable-replacement services known as virtual Multichannel Video Programming Distributors (vMVPDs). As we expect that this trend will continue to expand, we strongly support the FCC refreshing its vMVPD record, just as this committee is examining the streaming marketplace and its impact on broadcast localism.

Make no mistake, the changing landscape also creates increased broadcast viewership opportunities. The most important genres for linear television – sports and live news – are on broadcast TV. Americans appreciate being able to get this programming on their local stations, especially those offered for free over the air. No platform has been able to duplicate broadcasters' ability to bring local news and sports to the local viewer and with little or no cost. Sports and news bind communities together, not just for those who can afford it.

At Scripps, we want to see the broadcast marketplace continue to grow, and we're helping to lead this trend. Our strategy with Scripps Sports is two-fold. First, we want to use ION, the number-five-rated broadcast network in the U.S., to establish a national home for sports deserving increased visibility. One of the biggest problems for many sports, especially women's sports, has historically been that fans don't know when or where to find the games. We are proud to help solve that problem, working with

our league partners the WNBA and NWSL to establish national franchises, dramatically increasing the reach and exposure for this content. We have established ION as a leading sports brand for women's sports, taking our already solid viewership that surpassed networks like NBATV and ESPN2, to competing with and even besting a world-leading brand like ESPN on a weekly basis. In just the last year, Scripps has increased the reach of the WNBA by almost 30 percent.

The second part of our strategy is to provide visibility for professional teams to reach their fans in their home markets. In our very first season, we have doubled the ratings of the NHL's Vegas Golden Knights and quadrupled those of the Arizona Coyotes.

The opportunities that led to this past year's exciting developments at Scripps Sports rose from significant challenges faced by the regional sports network, or RSN, system. RSNs have lost significant distribution over the last several years, ultimately allowing teams to reach no more than 35 or 40 percent of their home market. We stepped in, as one of the largest owners of local broadcast television stations, working with both leagues and teams to offer an alternative that would provide long-term consistency and full market reach with the distribution of our channels over the air, as well as on cable and satellite. Our partnership with these leagues and teams, as well as our advertisers, benefits all sides. This model is only going to continue to expand, with Scripps leading the way.

In summary, as American sports fans, leagues and teams navigate the fragmented and seemingly uncertain future of the sports media marketplace, they are turning to a trusted home – broadcast television. Americans have a deep connection

with their hometown teams, and our local stations bring them this coverage. The same stations that viewers turn to for trusted, local voices on their newscasts are the natural and obvious places for them to go to watch their favorite local team or national sports league. These stations are available to fans and viewers for free, over the air, and must remain so. It is in this context – particularly in a competitive landscape where some sports are increasingly more expensive and inaccessible to many fans – that the committee should reject calls for legislation that would undermine critical laws such as retransmission consent, which is essential for local broadcasters' ability to invest in local sports and news. Americans deserve a healthy broadcast option, and Scripps is proud to help bring that to them.

Again, thank you for inviting me today. I look forward to answering your questions.