

March 21, 2016

Honorable Greg Walden, Chair
House Communications and Technology Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Support for FCC Expansion Consumers' Video Navigation Choices

Dear Chairman Walden,

I am Robert L. Johnson, Chairman of RLJ Entertainment (NASDAQ: RLJE) and Founder of Black Entertainment Television, and I am writing to express my full support for Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Tom Wheeler's NPRM to overhaul the rules for television set-top boxes which would allow consumers to view traditional cable and streaming video content on the television.

In 1980, I started the Nation's first and only African-American owned cable channel. As founder of Black Entertainment Television (BET), I know first-hand the barriers minority-owned programmers must face when trying to get carriage on cable. I vividly recall going from cable operator-to-cable operator to convince them that there was an underserved African-American consumer base who wanted to see quality entertainment and programming that was created especially for them and, more importantly, not available anywhere else.

Over 35 years later, there are still only a handful of African-American led cable channels, most of which are not available in every market, serving over 12 million African-American cable households who pay billions of dollars in cable subscriber fees. Today, there have been great changes in how consumers can access content; however, with the myriad of available devices, minority and niche programmers are not given the same visibility and access as the larger programming providers.

RLJ Entertainment has two proprietary digital streaming channels with exclusive and niche-focused content, UMC – Urban Movie Channel (urban-themed programming) and Acorn TV (British mystery and drama), that are available on a variety of platforms but would be better accessed if consumers could also find these and other streaming channels on their universal set-top boxes.

If you have a good program idea, some financing and access to the Internet, you can find your audience. But your audience can only find you if they have a modem, a set-top box, or app unconstrained by the network gatekeeper. My primary reason in supporting new technologies for navigating OTT channels is that it would simply increase control by consumers and give more opportunities to hundreds of minority programmers.

The frontier of new media and innovative access to programming through streaming and OTT channels, allows newcomers, particularly minority programmers, to have a voice in the digital age. Commissioner Wheeler's NPRM, I believe, will allow consumer choice and create opportunities for minority programmers. In my opinion, this is the best decision that the FCC has made to increase minority diversity in media content distribution since the Commission championed the tax certificate which allowed for the increase in minority ownership of media properties.

I applaud Commissioner Wheeler's efforts and am happy to provide any additional information if needed. I can be reached at my office at [REDACTED] or through my RLJE executive, Traci Otey Blunt, EVP, Corporate Marketing and Corporate Affairs at [REDACTED]

Best regards,

[REDACTED]
Robert L. Johnson
Chairman, RLJ Entertainment
Founder, Black Entertainment Television