

## As Seen on TV

Written by Garry Lee Wright  
Tuesday, 02 January 2001 18:00

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(The FCC said recently that TV networks should have identified the White House as a sponsor when anti-drug messages ran in prime-time scripts. Here's the original story from last January.)  
TO: Skip Kovacs, VP/ Network Operations FROM: J. Arthur Heeber, White Office of Drug Control Policy

Dear Mr. Kovacs: As you know, Congress has authorized us to purchase public-service announcements on your network. We also understand that it's a "buy one, get one free" sort of arrangement. So, how soon can we get started?

Very truly yours,  
J. Arthur Heeber

Dear Mr. Heeber: We're thrilled, of course, to give you as much half-price air time on our network as possible. But demographics-wise, I'm wondering if we're the right vehicle for you. Have you considered Fox, for example? They have availabilities on many popular programs, including America's Funniest Bomb Squad Mishaps. I'd be happy to call them on your behalf.

Best personal regards,  
Skip Kovacs

Dear Mr. Kovacs: We appreciate your generous offer to steer us to a worthy competitor, but we're convinced that you're the sort of "hip" network we need. Would it be possible to begin running the enclosed announcements immediately? We think you'll find them "right on." We're also working on some brand-new ones featuring Bob Hope.

Cordially,  
J. Arthur

Dear Mr. Heeber: Thank you so much for your tape. We especially enjoyed watching "General McCaffrey Raps with the Olsen Twins." But to be honest, our revenue situation makes it difficult to air so many PSAs at the expense of paying advertisers. Could we possibly hold off until summer?

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Best regards,  
Skip

Dear Skip: I'm afraid we can't wait. But here's an idea, if you'll keep it under your hat. We might forego the PSAs if you'd insert some messages directly into your scripts. For example, in that show where the kids are all at a diner, couldn't the waitress say something like, "Who ordered these fried eggs? My goodness, they look like your brain on drugs!" What do you think?

J. Arthur

Dear Mr. Heeber: After much discussion and soul-searching, we've reluctantly agreed to add your suggested dialogue. I must say that, despite the ethical questions, we're concerned that you're underestimating our viewers with such an obvious approach. A character may as well say, "I can't go to the concert tonight; I just joined the Army!" We hope this fulfills our requirement.

Skip Kovacs, VP/Network Operations

Dear Skip: We loved the Army idea! Can you also do one for the Marines and Air Force? What is your current draft status, by the way? And would it be possible to have one of the girls say "When I grow up, I want to be just like Madeleine Albright — she's so cool"? A sample script is enclosed.

J. Arthur Heeber

Dear Mr. Heeber: Really, now. It's a little hard for me to continue claiming to the press that "we never ceded creative control" when you insist on such things as a new character — like this "Mr. Haney, the kindly IRS agent." Please! Enough is enough.

Kovacs

Dear Skip: I'm afraid we still need your cooperation for now. There is a real-life Mr. Haney and, as kindly as he may seem, he's not above ordering audits. By the way, aren't your affiliates also licensed by the FCC? Please read the enclosed script carefully. It covers quite a bit of pending legislation as well as a guest shot by the vice president, who'd also like to sing a song.

J. Arthur Heeber

Mr. Heeber: We've read the script, and are all shocked and disgusted by your manipulation of our — I mean the public's — airwaves. At long last, sir, have you no shame?

Kovacs

Dear Skip: Glad you're on the team. Now, just one more idea. We'd like to see a TV show about all the good guys and gals in government. We were thinking about a series set in the West Wing of the White House; the President is an absolute saint with great hair, and the staff

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is so charming we love them even when they act like big shots. Now, when can we begin principal photography?

J.

J.: All right! Bring over the Bob Hope PSAs. I'll wait until you get here.

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