

To: Jackson, Ryan[jackson.ryan@epa.gov]
From: Morning Media
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Subject: Morning Media: Reading the Sinclair tea leaves -- Wall Street Journal editor taking heat -- The Guardian still waiting on Gianforte

By Alex Weprin | 08/24/2017 06:07 AM EDT

With Cristiano Lima

READING THE SINCLAIR TEA LEAVES: Sinclair Broadcasting has filed a document with the FCC responding to critics of its proposed acquisition of Tribune Broadcasting. You can read the whole thing [here](#), but I thought it would be instructive to look at it through the lens of recent coverage of the company.

-Is Sinclair trying to launch a Fox News competitor? Rumors of Sinclair taking on Fox have been rampant since the Tribune deal was announced, and recent [reports](#) have suggested that Sinclair might be talking to Steve Bannon about a partnership with Breitbart. Fox has also [suggested](#) that it may strip the Fox affiliation from the Tribune stations Sinclair is seeking to acquire. So is a Fox News competitor in the works? The filing gives little away, but it does note that Sinclair wants to be able to compete with the likes of Fox for advertising dollars: "By increasing the national footprint in which Sinclair stations broadcast and sell advertising, particularly by adding stations in the largest markets, such as New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, Sinclair will be better situated to sell advertising to national advertisers who are seeking a national platform. This will create an additional competitor in the network advertising space..."

-Is Sinclair biased, and does it force conservative programming on its local stations? Sinclair does not directly address its own political leanings, but it does imply that the rest of the broadcast media tilts one way, and that they are providing "a new voice" to the market. Sinclair has a large D.C. bureau, and uses it to funnel national news stories to its local affiliates.

"The Washington D.C. news bureau contributes not only to the quantity and quality of information available to local viewers around the country, but adds to the diversity of viewpoints on national issues by providing a new voice in addition to those of ABC, NBC and CBS, which currently dominate the national broadcast news offerings in most local markets," the filing says. "Petitioners further allege that the transaction is against the public interest because Sinclair presents biased or 'conservative' news coverage. Taken at face value, petitioners' arguments would suggest that Sinclair's acquisition of Tribune would increase diversity, because it is adding a different 'voice' to the marketplace, just a voice with which petitioners apparently disagree."

-As for those "must-run" commentary segments [featuring](#) former Trump staffer Boris Epshteyn and conservative commentator Mark Hyman: Sinclair argues that they make up such a small chunk of programming, they don't really matter.

"Petitioners' specious claims about Sinclair programming are mostly limited to one or two brief commentaries that constitute less than 1% of the average total weekly news hours offered by

Sinclair's stations.³ All 'must-run' news programming in total (including news from the Washington, D.C. News Bureau) makes up approximately 2.5% of the total average news minutes per week. The remaining 97.5% of the news program time is devoted to local news, with the rest of each station's schedule consisting of local sports programming, network news and programming, syndicated programming, or other programming purchased or developed by Sinclair employees in the various local markets where Sinclair owns television stations."

-Sinclair is one of the most interesting companies in media today, and its proposed acquisition of Tribune would make it one of the largest media companies in the country. Despite the conventional wisdom that no one watches TV anymore, according to [Pew](#), TV is still the primary news source for most consumers, and local TV news programs have more viewers than the national news broadcasts and cable news channels.

Good morning and welcome to Morning Media. We have a meaty newsletter this morning, so grab another cup of coffee! I want to make Morning Media better and more useful to you, so please send me tips, ideas and feedback! I'm on Twitter [@alexweprin](#) and on email at alexweprin@gmail.com. Morning Media is produced with help from **Cristiano Lima** (clima@politico.com / [@ludacristiano](#)). [Archives](#). [Subscribe](#).

WALL STREET JOURNAL EDITOR GERARD BAKER IS AGAIN UNDER FIRE for his direction of the Journal's coverage of President Trump. Leaked emails [obtained by The New York Times](#) show him criticizing reporters for a draft story about the president's divisive Tuesday rally, where he repeatedly berated the media. "Sorry. This is commentary dressed up as news reporting," Baker said in response to an write-up of the rally. He later added: "Could we please just stick to reporting what he said rather than packaging it in exegesis and selective criticism?"

-It's not the first time his leadership on Trump has been questioned. A full transcript of an interview between Baker, the president and other members of his administration [obtained by POLITICO last month](#) highlighted the top editor's familiar relationship with the president and his family, again raising concerns about the Journal's coverage of the president. Read more on the [latest controversy here](#).

RALLY RATINGS: President Trump may have told attendees of Tuesday night's rally that the TV cameras were being shut off, but in reality, the rally was a ratings draw for cable news. Fox News averaged 4.4 million viewers during the rally, while MSNBC averaged 2.4 million and CNN 2 million, according to ratings data from Nielsen. One interesting quirk: MSNBC saw its ratings drop when the rally started, falling from 3.1 million for Rachel Maddow at 9 p.m., to 2.4 million during the rally. CNN meanwhile added 700,000 viewers when the rally started, while Fox News added 1.8 million viewers once the rally began.

-I thought Charlie Warzel's [take on the rally](#) was interesting. Warzel argues that Trump, who has no campaign opposition to speak of right now, is setting up the media to be the opposition. "Or, as pro-Trump media personality Jack Posobiec put it to me this morning: 'Trump's a builder. We're now in the demolition phase of this construction project,'" Warzel wrote.

-I didn't forget about the eclipse. Yesterday I gave you the cable news ratings, today, you get the broadcast numbers. ABC had a pretty incredible 7.9 million viewers tune in. CBS had just shy of 6 million, NBC had 2.6 million.

THE GUARDIAN STILL WAITING ON GIANFORTE INTERVIEW: Rep. Greg Gianforte, the man who body-slammed Guardian reporter Ben Jacobs ahead of a special election earlier this year, still has not sat down for an interview with the outlet, despite seeming to pledge to do so at his sentencing hearing. "Ben Jacobs first reached out to Congressman Gianforte for an on-the-record interview on June 22 and has been in ongoing communication with his office since then," a Guardian spokesperson [told The Washington Post's Erik Wemple](#) . "So far, the Congressman has yet to commit to this interview. However, in light of his promise to sit down for an interview with Ben in the courtroom before being sentenced on June 12, we fully expect the Congressman to be a man of his word."

ESPN PRESIDENT WEIGHS IN ON ROBERT LEE EPISODE: ESPN president John Skipper sent an email to staff at the channel last night, explaining in more detail what led up to broadcaster Robert Lee being moved off of a college football game he was supposed to host in Virginia. "I'm disappointed that the good intentions of our Charlotte colleagues have been intentionally hijacked by someone with a personal agenda, and sincerely appreciate Robert's personal input and professionalism throughout this episode," Skipper wrote. Read the whole thing [here](#).

-Sports Illustrated's Richard Deitsch has [even more detail](#).

"IT'S NOT PROPAGANDA BECAUSE IT'S TRUE" That's what Lara Trump, wife of Eric Trump and daughter-in-law of President Donald Trump, said in defense of her recent "real news" Facebook round-up segments on the president's campaign social media page. Lara Trump, a former "Inside Edition" producer, told the Christian Broadcasting Network that the segments she's hosted are necessary since President Trump doesn't get "a fair shake within the regular news cycle." The segments have also featured appearances from former pro-Trump pundit Kayleigh McEnany, who left CNN last month to join the Republican National Committee. [Read on here](#).

TODAY IN TABS: I haven't picked up a copy of the latest edition of The National Enquirer, but based on the cover, it looks like they have knives out for Megyn Kelly and CNN. "Inside Kelly Ripa & Megyn Kelly's explosive showdown!" one headline blares. "Dirty secrets of CNN: Drugs. Brawls. On-set sex!" another reads. The Enquirer's owner David Pecker is friendly with President Trump, as my colleague Jack Shafer [noted](#).

-Also, is Taylor Swift's new album tabloid themed? The [album cover](#) for "Reputation," features Swift in front of newsprint bearing her name. If anyone could make newspapers popular again, it would be her.

MUST WATCH:

-As the father of a toddler, I can relate to [this news anchor](#) who stayed remarkably calm even as

two little ones took over the studio.

-Here's [the first trailer](#) for Comedy Central's new late night show "The Opposition," which mocks alt-right outlets like InfoWars in the same way "The Colbert Report" mocked cable news.

SOUNDBITE: "Giving people a voice is not enough without having organizations dedicated to uncovering new information and analyzing it. We're going to keep experimenting with different ways to support the news industry and make sure reporters and publishers everywhere can keep doing their important work." -Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, [in a post explaining](#) how the site plans to work with journalists and newsrooms moving forward.

REVOLVING DOOR:

-Jay Solomon, who [was fired](#) by The Wall Street Journal in June over his relationship with an arms dealer, [has joined](#) The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, where he will research North Korea's weapons proliferation in the Middle East.

-Lauren Ramsby has joined Patch as director of news partnerships. Lauren was managing editor of Peter Kaplan's NY Observer, and then was managing editor of the NY Post for 10 years.

-The Daily Beast has named Mia Libby CRO. Libby was previously senior VP of sales at Fusion Media Group.

-Fox Sports baseball reporter Ken Rosenthal [will be bringing](#) his writing to subscription sports site The Athletic. He'll still do TV for Fox.

EXTRAS:

-New Los Angeles Times publisher Ross Levinsohn is set to cash in with a starting salary of \$1 million, with ample opportunities for performance bonuses. [[Poynter](#)]

-Here's a good interview with retiring Fox News correspondent Carl Cameron. [[THR](#)]

-In remembrance of Swedish journalist Kim Wall, whose remains were found in the waters near Copenhagen this week. [[BuzzFeed](#)]

-What The Village Voice, which just shuttered its print publication, taught us about speaking truth to power. [[The Nation](#)]

-"NBC Nightly News" anchor Lester Holt is profiled by Guideposts magazine. [[Guideposts](#)]

-The Washington Post is bringing artificial intelligence to its native ads [[Digiday](#)]

-The new FOMO: Have constant breaking news updates created a new tech addiction? [[WIRED](#)]

-Why D.C. won't soon see the likes of deceased NBC4 anchor Jim Vance again. [[The](#)

Washingtonian]

-Hollywood's fall TV line-up leaves much to be desired in terms of diversity. [Bloomberg]

-The Financial Times digs into Bloomberg's expansion into the consulting world [FT]

-The Mic takedowns continue, this one from The Daily Caller. [Daily Caller]

-POLITICO's own Eliana Johnson joins "Pod Save America" to talk Bannon, Breitbart and Trump. [Stitcher]

To view online:

<http://www.politico.com/media/tipsheets/morning-media/2017/08/24/reading-the-sinclair-tea-leaves-wall-street-journal-editor-taking-heat-the-guardian-still-waiting-on-gianforte-001339>

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