

# Political Broadcasts

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*A series of Letters Exchanged between the*  
Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc.

*and the*  
Republican National Committee

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## NOTE

*Radio has become one of our most important instruments for public communication. Those who have the responsibility of directing network broadcasting in the United States bear the even greater responsibility of keeping this vital instrument essentially non-partisan in all its activities.*

*Discussion has recently arisen between the network broadcasting companies and the Republican National Committee over the basic question of what is non-partisan and fair in the allotment and use of broadcasting time.*

*The letters recently exchanged between the Republican National Committee and the Columbia Broadcasting System are perhaps of more than passing interest, in the light they shed both on the principles that guide American broadcasting to this end and on the network's application of these principles to a specific problem in non-partisanship, neutrality and fair play.*

*In order that those who are interested in this important subject may have available the point of view of the Columbia Broadcasting System, the correspondence is reprinted in the following pages.*

COLUMBIA BROADCASTING SYSTEM, INC.

485 Madison Avenue, New York

REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE  
BARR BUILDING, WASHINGTON, D. C.

December 13, 1935

MR. EDWARD KLAUBER, *First Vice President*  
Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc.  
485 Madison Avenue  
New York City

My dear Mr. Klauber:

The Republican National Committee is preparing its plans for radio broadcasting. These plans contemplate the purchase of the following radio time over the Columbia networks and owned and managed stations:

*(At this point Mr. Sabin set forth the types  
of periods and amounts of time desired.)*

The programs to be used will be such vehicles as the Republican National Committee may in its opinion deem to be proper for carrying the Republican message to the people.

As I have a meeting in Washington Monday morning on the question of plans and budgets it will be appreciated if you will advise by return special delivery letter so I may advise the Honorable Henry P. Fletcher, Chairman of the Republican National Committee, as to the acceptance by your company of this business, when, as and if, offered on the above basis.

Thanking you in advance for a prompt reply, I am,

Cordially,

THOMAS G. SABIN

*Director, Radio Division*

Republican National Committee.



COLUMBIA BROADCASTING SYSTEM, INC.  
485 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK

December 21, 1935

MR. THOMAS G. SABIN, *Director*, Radio Division  
Republican National Committee  
Barr Building  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Sabin:

I am sorry not to have been in position to reply sooner to your letter of December 13 but as a matter of fact I have been almost continuously absent from the office for the past week . . .

Inasmuch as Mr. H. K. Boice, our vice president in charge of sales, and I explained to you very fully our policies in regard to political advertising a day or two before your letter was written, I am hopeful that my failure to reply sooner was no obstacle to you.

In view of the fact that since our meeting you have made inquiries as to the availability of Howard Barlow for transcriptions, I would assume that your plans have turned in other directions. If, however, you still would like me to reply in detail to your letter, I shall be glad to do so upon receipt of further advice from you, and meantime I feel that I should inform you that our policies are precisely as they were carefully explained to you earlier in detail.

Sincerely yours,

EDWARD KLAUBER

*First Vice President*

Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc.

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REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE  
BARR BUILDING, WASHINGTON, D. C.

December 26, 1935

MR. EDWARD KLAUBER, *First Vice President*  
Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc.  
485 Madison Avenue  
New York City

My dear Mr. Klauber:

Thank you very much for your letter of December 21st which reached me this morning.

I am afraid I am going to have to avail myself of the offer extended in the final paragraph of your letter and ask you to specifically reply to all questions raised in my letter of December 13.

I think you will agree that the transmission of verbal conversation carries the possibility of error and therefore, the Chairman and I both feel that inasmuch as your letter of December 21st did not specifically reply to the questions raised in my letter we necessarily must ask for a complete reply to all the questions raised in the December 13th letter.

With regard to that portion of your letter relating to transcriptions, I would like to keep this is a separate matter as it in no way affects our general plans.

Thanking you in advance for outlining your policies in a complete reply to my previous letter, I am with the season's greetings

Very cordially,

THOMAS G. SABIN

*Director, Radio Division*

Republican National Committee.

Kindly address your reply to:

1 East 57th Street, Room 903,

New York City

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COLUMBIA BROADCASTING SYSTEM, INC.  
485 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK

December 27, 1935

MR. THOMAS G. SABIN, *Director*, Radio Division  
Republican National Committee  
1 East 57th Street, Room 903  
New York City

My dear Mr. Sabin:

Replying to your letters of December 13 and December 26, this is to advise you that it is our policy not to sell time for political broadcasting until after the regular party conventions next summer. We are leaving to the judgment of the managers of those few stations we own the question of whether or not they will sell time for political broadcasting before the conventions to local and state committees.

We will not allow dramatization of political issues if time is bought after the conventions.

Our reasons for not selling time at present are as follows: We feel it to be our duty as a public service to devote a proper amount of time to the discussion of political issues without charge. When the campaigns actually are on so much time is needed for this purpose in more or less regular series that we are then compelled to charge for it, but we do not wish to charge until we have to. The sale of such time over an indefinite period in such



quantities as parties have been about to buy would destroy or threaten the destruction of our program balance, and this we do not believe to be in the best interests of the public or of good broadcasting.

Our reasons for not allowing dramatizations are as follows: Appeals to the electorate should be intellectual and not based on emotion, passion or prejudice. We recognize that even the oratorical discussion of campaign issues can be to a degree stamped with the aforementioned flaws, but we are convinced that dramatizations would throw the radio campaign almost wholly over to the emotional side. Then, too, we believe that the dramatic method by its very nature would tend to over-emphasize incidents of minor importance and significance, simply because of the dramatic value. While we realize that no approach to the electorate is absolutely ideal, we believe American voters have long been trained to discriminate among the assertions of orators whereas we do not believe they could discriminate fairly among dramatizations, so that the turn of national issues might well depend on the skill of warring dramatists rather than on the merits of the issue debated.

Very truly yours,

EDWARD KLAUBER

*First Vice President*

Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc.

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*Telegram of January 1, 1936*

THE PRESIDENT

Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc.

485 Madison Avenue

New York City

The press announces that arrangements have been made or are being made by your company to broadcast over a nationwide hookup the speech to be delivered by the President to the Congress on Friday night. If this be true, as chairman of the Republican National Committee I respectfully request that your company allot on some closely following day the same amount of time over the same stations at the same hour of the day given to Mr. Roosevelt for a broadcast of comment on the issues confronting the next session of Congress by Republican spokesmen to be selected by me after consultation with the Republican leaders of both Houses of Congress.

The essence of American democracy and free speech is fairness. If you grant my request it will demonstrate that you are in no way influenced by fear of the party in power.

The President is a candidate for reelection this year. The House of Representatives and the United States Senate have only once before set aside their rules to have a special night session for a presidential address. That was the memorable occasion in April, 1917, when war was declared.

So far as the American press is concerned it would print the text of the President's message irrespective of the hour of the joint session and the members of Congress would quite as readily attend a day session in the regular course.

The President's decision to dramatize his message and to bring down to the level of a political speech his constitutional right and duty to address the Congress on the state of the Union is understandable in the light of past performances.

It is apparent therefore that the President considers the members of the Senate and the House as only incidentally his audience and that he will be addressing himself to the electorate as a part of his campaign for reelection. Of course he has a perfect right to do so if the Congress sets aside the time it wishes to receive his message.

We are not objecting to the program outlined but merely requesting an equal opportunity to place our case before the people with the same facilities, the same stations and potentially the same audience.

The political character of the speeches by members of the administration over the radio should be recognized for what they are. Both sides of the vital current issues should be presented to the American jury for their own judgment. Unless the party in opposition be granted equal facilities the dominant party can control the instrumentalities of communication in an effort to perpetuate itself in power.

I would appreciate a prompt response so that I may arrange for speakers to present the Republican point of view.

HENRY P. FLETCHER

*Chairman*

Republican National Committee.

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*Telegram of January 2, 1936*

HONORABLE HENRY P. FLETCHER, *Chairman*  
Republican National Committee  
Washington, D. C.

This is in reply to your telegram of January 1 requesting that we allot to Republican spokesmen to be chosen by you on some closely following day the same amount of time over the same stations at the same hour of the day given to the President for his address tomorrow night to the Congress and to the American people.

We have considered with great care the reasons set forth by you for believing this action should be taken by us. We do not question your right to ascribe to the President political motives for his decision to address the people of America at the same time that



he addresses their Congress. On the other hand we do not believe that you should ask us to base our allotments of time on such interpretation by you or by others. The Columbia Broadcasting System will continue to distinguish between the office of President and the Government, on the one hand, and the political parties and their candidates on the other without regard to whether a candidate is in office or out.

Throughout this company's existence Columbia has always acceded to requests for time to be used by the President in addressing the people of the United States. With regard to the specifications of your request for time, I must inform you that I do not believe it is either possible or wise for broadcasting to adopt a mathematical formula of fairness. This is true first because broadcasting has many duties and responsibilities besides serving as a medium for the dissemination of political discussion and second because public interest in varying issues—as nearly as we can judge it—the speakers, the probability of their effecting the action which they advocate and many other factors enter into the decision as to how much time to allot to whom.

For us to adopt anything like a mathematical formula would be wholly to disregard other demands of balanced programming and to surrender into the keeping of others the exercise of editorial judgment and responsibility which we believe devolves upon us and which we gladly accept and seek to discharge.

We believe that a demand similar to that made upon us would be almost unanimously rejected by the newspaper editors of this country who would not commit the allotment of either position or space in their newspapers into the hands of others but who on the contrary have, rightly I believe, always reserved to themselves judgment as to relative position and space to be allotted to political addresses and all other news events.

We are not under the domination of this administration and we have never been under the domination of any other. I am therefore forced to challenge the statement in your telegram to me that for us to accede to your request would be proof that we are not under such domination. We do not need such proof. Our record is proof enough. Throughout our history we have allotted freely time on the air for political discussion and we shall continue to do so. Within the past few weeks we have presented among others in opposition Senator Borah, Former President Hoover, Representative Hamilton Fish, the Honorable Henry P. Fletcher, and we have scheduled to speak in the near future, in a number of instances at our own invitation, Former President Hoover, John W. Davis, Jouett Shouse, Colonel Frank M. Knox, Governor Alf M. Landon and Senator L. J. Dickinson.

After the President has delivered his address to the Congress and to the people, if the Republican Party desires that we allot time to certain speakers for the purpose of combatting such portions of his address as leave them in disagreement, we should be glad in fairness and in the exercise of our best editorial judgment to allot such available time as we believe befits the circumstances. On the other hand, so that you will understand our position and our reasons for it, I must explain that in the interest of what we judge to be good broadcasting, this company cannot accept the principle that all broadcast activities of the Government of the United States or its spokesmen are in the nature of



political activities and are to be mathematically balanced by similar broadcasts at similar time by a political party in opposition to the party to which Mr. Roosevelt belongs.

I hope I have made clear to you that we distinguish between the President of the United States and Franklin D. Roosevelt as a candidate for political office and we shall try to apportion time among the political candidates and their supporters with fairness and with good editorial judgment.

WILLIAM S. PALEY

*President*

Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc.

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REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE  
BARR BUILDING, WASHINGTON, D. C.

January 4, 1936

MR. WILLIAM S. PALEY, *President*  
Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc.  
485 Madison Avenue  
New York, N. Y.

My dear Mr. Paley:

Under date of December 27th the first Vice President of your Company, Mr. Edward Klauber, replied to a letter of Mr. Sabin, December 13, outlining the following policies of the Columbia Broadcasting System:

- (1) "It is our policy not to sell time for political broadcasts until after the party conventions next summer."
- (2) "We will not allow dramatization of political issues if time is bought after the conventions."

As the Republican National Committee's plans for the use of radio are completed and time is an essence, I would appreciate your advising me by return mail that the policies outlined in Mr. Klauber's letter are the policies of the Columbia Broadcasting System.

Very truly yours,

HENRY P. FLETCHER

*Chairman*

Republican National Committee.

COLUMBIA BROADCASTING SYSTEM, INC.  
485 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK

January 8, 1936

HONORABLE HENRY P. FLETCHER, *Chairman*  
Republican National Committee  
Barr Building  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This is to advise you in reply to your letter of January 4 that Mr. Edward Klauber, First Vice President of this company, set forth correctly to you the policies of the Columbia Broadcasting System when he advised you:

- (1) "It is our policy not to sell time for political broadcasts until after the party conventions next summer."
- (2) "We will not allow dramatization of political issues if time is bought after the conventions."

In Mr. Klauber's letter there was a brief exposition of the company's reasons for adopting these policies, but it has now occurred to me that because of your great interest in broadcasting and your intention to make use of it as one of the media for conducting the Republican campaign, it might be well for me to tell you more completely some of the guiding principles which we have adopted for our operations after some considerable experience and a great deal of thought and research into public attitudes.

As you know, we are required under the Communications Act of 1934 to operate as public convenience, interest or necessity requires. Naturally we wish not only to comply with the spirit and the letter of that Act, but to do all things possible within the scope of reasonable and sound business operations to perpetuate the American system of broadcasting.

In trying to conduct our operations on what we conceive to be a sound basis with the foregoing objectives in view, we sacrifice every year a good many hundreds of thousands of dollars of revenue, and do not sell time to any organization to do with exactly what it pleases. In other words, we have set certain standards which we have greatly refined in the light of experience, and we have sold time only to purchasers admissible under those standards and willing to comply in all particulars with sound program policies. We have allotted time without charge on precisely the same basis, and only on the same basis.

I think you will readily see that American broadcasting could not be soundly conducted on any other basis. Its custody is in our hands and in the hands of other broadcasters and I know you will realize that it is inevitable that from time to time various persons or organizations should seek to put it to uses which are unsuitable. This is sometimes the case among advertisers, because while generally speaking they have raised rather than lowered broadcast standards, there are always those who seek to make selfish or opportunist uses of the medium and who thereupon need to be brought within prescribed and reasonable regulation.



The same thing is true of non-commercial organizations seeking to use broadcasting to serve their particular causes.

I think it must be obvious that if anything like program balance is to be maintained, and experience as to what constitutes good broadcasting is to be applied, the broadcasting system rather than the user or would-be user must dictate program policy. Otherwise it would be impossible to give to the public in either quality or quantity anything like a balanced ration of education, discussion, high class entertainment, popular entertainment, news, and all the other things which the public wants.

In pursuance of the general policy I have outlined in the foregoing paragraph, we quite frequently refuse to take talk programs simply because their addition to the schedule at the moment would, in our judgment, throw our program structure out of balance. I am sure that you will understand that this would be the case practically all of the time if we left to people with all kinds of interests and causes to serve the determination of just how much time should be allotted to the advancement of their projects, and this is true whether the time is given away or sold. It is further true that broadcasting should be a flexible and swiftly responsive medium and this means that programs of talk and discussions should be put on as news develops and as public interest and attention shifts from one subject or situation to another. It, therefore, is important that we should not schedule in advance too many programs of this nature in fixed and regular series, because if we do our program structure is thrown all out of gear by the addition of these quick and timely programs. I have dwelt at some length on the general basis of our operations because I think with these principles in mind you will more readily understand the reasons for the particular decisions which you have asked to have confirmed to you.

With regard to these particular decisions, let me tell you first of all that it is our fixed policy not to sell time for propaganda of any sort. When we think that the public is sufficiently interested in a subject suitable for discussion over the air so that propagandists of opposing sides should be heard, we allot the time without charge. Our decision to forego the immense revenues which could be had from the sale of time for propaganda was based on two main grounds:

- (1) We felt that the exercise of the wisest editorial judgment we are able to bring to bear, rather than the ability of others to pay, should govern decisions as to what subjects should be discussed and what subjects lacked sufficient public interest in proportion to other things to merit discussion and, further, that such editorial judgment should govern the amount of time devoted to such discussion in a given case.
- (2) We have an absolute conviction that the air would be misused were such discussion confined to those causes or advocates of causes who were able to pay and we would very quickly build up an undemocratic and un-American situation in which the air belonged to those with money. This would result in some things not being heard at all and in one side of others being preponderantly presented.



I realize that it is difficult to define precisely what we mean by propaganda; in fact this company has tried as far as possible to keep away from rigid definitions and arbitrary decisions and to rely upon common sense and the editorial judgment of those who operate it. What I mean in a general way, however, is this: We would not, for example, sell time to the public utilities holding companies to agitate against proposed legislation restricting or regulating their operations. We would and did give them time in which to argue against such proposed legislation just as we gave the advocates time to argue in favor of such legislation. On the other hand if the public utilities wanted to buy time to advertise their goods and services—that is, to promote the use of gas and electricity—we would unhesitatingly sell them available time for such use. To illustrate a little further, we sell time to commercial sponsors for the promotion of the sale of their goods or services or the creation of institutional good will, but we do not allow them to use such bought time to agitate for high or low tariffs, changes in national or city or state tax structures, or other things of that nature.

It is in pursuance of this general policy with regard to propaganda that we have decided that we will not now sell time to the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, or any other political organization, until after the conventions next summer. It is our intention to continue to devote as much time as seems to us to constitute good broadcasting to the use of political speakers without charge.

I hope I have made clear to you why we will not sell you time at present, and now let me explain our reason for intending to sell it to you, if you wish to buy it, after the conventions. When the candidates are actually nominated, and the parties are campaigning for votes we recognize that a good deal of broadcasting time should, in the public interest, be devoted to political discussion. While we are wholly in accord with the wish of the parties to use such an amount of time—and to use it on a more or less regular basis—we cannot economically afford to allow such use without pay. We shall, therefore, as in past years, treat such broadcasting as commercial and charge our regular rates, selling you available time in such amounts as you desire to buy, provided, of course, your requirements are not so great as in our judgment to upset our program structure.

Now, finally, with regard to our decision not at any time to give to you or to sell to you time for the dramatization of political issues. I believe I already have explained rather fully our reason for never selling time to any person or any organization with full right to make such use of that time as he or it sees fit. I trust I have made plain that on the contrary we never sell time except for use in conformance with our general program policies, since responsibility for the structure of broadcasting lies with us, rather than with those who buy time from us.

Before we decided that we would not allow political parties to present the issues in dramatized form, we considered this question wholly in the light of the public service we might render or the public disservice we might do. We actually listened to one of these dramatizations in audition with great care before we reached our decision. Not a single person in this organization among the numerous ones with whom we discussed it dissented



from the view that such dramatizations by the political parties should not go on the air over the Columbia Broadcasting System. Since the reasons for this decision were stated to you concisely in Mr. Klauber's letter of December 27, 1935, I repeat that portion of the letter here in order to make this a complete document:

"Appeals to the electorate should be intellectual and not based on emotion, passion or prejudice. We recognize that even the oratorical discussion of campaign issues can be to a degree stamped with the aforementioned flaws, but we are convinced that dramatizations would throw the radio campaign almost wholly over to the emotional side. Then, too, we believe that the dramatic method by its very nature would tend to over-emphasize incidents of minor importance and significance, simply because of the dramatic value. While we realize that no approach to the electorate is absolutely ideal, we believe American voters have long been trained to discriminate among the assertions of orators, whereas we do not believe they could discriminate fairly among dramatizations, so that the turn of national issues might well depend on the skill of warring dramatists rather than on the merits of the issue debated."

In conclusion, let me say that Columbia will continue to operate on a completely non-partisan basis, and let me assure you that our reasons for not being able completely to meet the wishes of the Republican National Committee with respect to the sale of time now and with respect to dramatizations are solely based upon the most reasoned and dispassionate beliefs about good broadcasting service to the American public that we are able to bring to bear upon the situation.

Very truly yours,

WILLIAM S. PALEY

*President*

Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc.

REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE  
BARR BUILDING, WASHINGTON, D. C.

January 13, 1936

MR. WILLIAM S. PALEY, *President*  
Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc.  
485 Madison Avenue  
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Paley:

Replying to your letter of January 4,\* and your telegram of the second, in reply to my telegram of January 1, with reference to political broadcasting, I do not for a moment question your right to determine for yourselves what policies should be exercised by the Columbia Broadcasting System in the use of its facilities. I cannot, however, free myself of the impression that the attitude you have taken is affected and perhaps involuntarily controlled by the political party in power which regulates the issuance of your licenses.

The Republican National Committee has made two requests of your Company. The first is for free facilities comparable to those you have afforded Democratic spokesmen, including the President, now an acknowledged candidate. The second is to rent and pay for such time on the air as is arranged for other programs sponsored by advertisers.

I believe your policy "not to sell time for political broadcasts until after the regular party conventions next summer" will leave in the minds of the American public the distinct impression that you are either exercising an unwarranted degree of censorship or that you fear punitive action by the Federal Communications Commission.

I am informed that both the National Broadcasting Company and Columbia Broadcasting System cleared the air of all programs on the night of January 3 and January 8 for the President so that the facilities of some 180 stations were made available for what were in large part political talks of a candidate. I assume this was free time and the question arises, was this in the nature of a donation to a political party by the Radio Companies or by the Corporations sponsoring programs which were displaced by the President's speeches?

It seems to me that the services of the great radio chains should be as non-partisan and free from governmental domination as are great news services like the A.P., U.P., International News, etc., and give both sides an absolutely equal break.

Now as to the refusal of both the major broadcasting systems to rent or lease us time on their networks prior to the National Conventions. It is precisely because the Republican National Committee desires to bring home to the voters the effect of the administration's aims and policies and the vital issues affecting the very foundations of constitutional government, before the heat and fury of the political campaign, that we have planned to take advantage now of modern radio technique to convey our message. Your letter speaks of objections to the use of dramatic sketches in political programs. So long as these are truly represented

\* Undoubtedly a mis-typing; the reference is to Mr. Paley's letter of January 8th.



—as they would be—by the announcer as dramatic sketches, as is done in the presentation of commercial programs, I fail to see any legitimate reason for your refusing them, nor have we any intention of cluttering up or overcrowding your facilities.

The statement in your letter that “appeals to the electorate should be intellectual and not based on emotion, passion or prejudice” seems almost funny in the light of the impassioned appeal to class prejudice made by the President in his Congressional broadcast on January 3rd. To my mind the use of what you are pleased to call your “editorial judgment” amounts in practice to censorship.

The two great systems enjoy under the ninety day license system imposed by the Federal Communications Commission a precarious lease of the great theatre of the air. You decline to open the doors of this theatre to those in opposition to the policies of the administration unless your “editorial judgment” approves the program to be presented.

In view of the public interest involved in this question of the freedom of the air, I am giving a copy of this letter to the Press.

Yours truly,

HENRY P. FLETCHER

*Chairman*

Republican National Committee.

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COLUMBIA BROADCASTING SYSTEM, INC.  
485 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK

January 13, 1936

HONORABLE HENRY P. FLETCHER, *Chairman*  
Republican National Committee  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Fletcher:

Your letter to me, dated and made public today, needs little answer other than the facts, although I think it is only fair to state at the outset that you are under a misapprehension in all of your assumptions that the Federal Communications Commission could—even if it would—take punitive action against us for political reasons or that we live in fear of this administration or any other. There is nothing in the Federal Communications law which would allow the Commission to act from partisan political motives, and if it did so act, its judgments would very promptly be reversed by the Federal courts. Moreover, if this company were subject to such domination by any political party as is implied by you, the American people would be served so shabbily that I should lose all interest in the conduct of this business.



You have never asked us for free facilities and been refused. What you did ask was for us to assume in advance that an address by the President of the United States to the people of America and their Congress was a political speech, and to set aside in advance of the delivery of that speech comparable time for a Republican answer. We refused to treat the President of the United States other than as the President of the United States and shall continue so to refuse. We made plain to you and now repeat to you that we shall distinguish between the President as President and Franklin D. Roosevelt as a candidate for office. We told you that after the President had spoken we would be glad upon request from you to allot time that in our judgment befitted the circumstances. Since the President delivered his message we have asked you to state your desires for such time, and you have failed to do so. You therefore are wholly inaccurate when you try to present this incident in the light of a refusal of time on our part.

Your whole letter is worded as if we were treating one political party on a different basis than the other. The fact is that we refuse to sell time to any political party before the conventions, and we give time to both. I again explain to you that this refusal, which costs us hundreds of thousands of dollars every year, is based upon our belief that we are charged with a public duty to allot time for the free discussion of controversial public questions including politics, and we refuse to sell time for this purpose. We believe that American broadcasting would be greatly injured if we did allot such time on a paid basis and allowed monied organizations or interests to dominate the discussion of controversial public issues. We believe the American public will uphold us in our view that our own editorial judgment, rather than the availability of funds in the hands of others, should regulate the amount of time given to the various sides of any discussion and we believe the public will agree that such discussion should be in proportion to the general public interest in the subject and that there should be due regard to the necessity for maintaining general program balance.

You cannot with justice accuse us of censorship nor should you assail our editorial judgment unless and until you are prepared to cite specific instances or to point to what you judge to be some general unfairness on our part. These are the facts with regard to our political broadcasts in recent months:

From October 2 to January 11, the Columbia Broadcasting System presented 16 political addresses by Republican spokesmen and 13 by Democratic spokesmen. During this time Columbia made several offers to the Republican party of its facilities for their speakers which were not utilized, notably on December 16 for you yourself to summarize results of the National Republican Committee meeting in Washington. From January 14 to January 29 of this year, Columbia has scheduled 4 addresses by Republican spokesmen and 3 by Democratic spokesmen. We have, besides, frequently given time to opponents of the President within the Democratic party, to speakers nominated by the Liberty League and many other organizations in general disagreement with the President's policies.

I am glad to answer your question as to whether or not the time we allotted for the President's speech was a donation to a political party. It certainly was not. It was a donation to the American people. It has always been our policy to make time available for the



President of the United States when he wished to address the nation. We followed this policy through two Republican administrations and we follow it now.

I completely and thoroughly agree with you that we should be as non-partisan as the press associations in giving both sides "an absolutely equal break." At the same time I assure you that no reputable or responsible press association is run on a mathematical basis under which so many words on a given day are allotted to each political party. The press associations follow the breaks of the news and the shifting of public interest from issue to issue and from person to person. We would not be doing anything but an automaton's job if we tried to run broadcasting otherwise.

I say to you now that when the campaign is over I am absolutely convinced that you and all responsible members of your party will be satisfied that we have been scrupulously fair, just as we have been in the past, and I do not think you should impugn our fairness until you have evidence to the contrary.

We have no quarrel with your desire to present the issues to the voters "before the heat and fury of the political campaign." It is our full intention to allow you ample time for such presentation, but we must persist in our refusal to take money for it because we do not believe it would be sound broadcasting to do so.

I disagree with you flatly that dramatizations of the political issues are unobjectionable provided they are tagged as dramatizations. We here at Columbia still believe that the issues should be discussed intellectually by responsible and identified speakers and not fictionalized. I repeat to you that the dramatic method in the hands of skilled dramatists will serve to confuse issues, to over-emphasize minor points which have dramatic value, and generally to distort political discussion.

You say that we have "a precarious lease of the great theatre of the air" and that we declined to open the doors of this theatre to those in opposition to the policies of the Administration unless our "editorial judgment" approved the program to be presented. We have not closed the door. We have only refused to accept money for opening it, and have declined in respect to dramatized broadcasts to permit a method of broadcasting which we believe would be injurious to the American public.

Finally, I agree with you that the system of short-term licenses under which American broadcasting operates could be very greatly improved. Broadcasting should unquestionably be put on a more permanent basis. But the entire record of this company refutes your charge that the present system has forced us into any sort of partisanship.

As long as the custody of an important part of American broadcasting remains in our hands, we intend, I repeat to you, to accept our responsibilities and to discharge them as honestly and as largely in the public interest and in the interest of good broadcasting as we know how.

Very truly yours,

WILLIAM S. PALEY

*President*

Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc.

REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE  
BARR BUILDING, WASHINGTON, D. C.

January 14, 1936

MR. WILLIAM S. PALEY, *President*  
Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc.  
485 Madison Avenue  
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Paley:

I think our correspondence plants the issue squarely before the American people and I am willing to leave it to their calm and unbiased judgment whether or not, on the record thus made, your System is or is not exercising censorship of the air.

There is, however, just one point in your letter I desire to answer. You say,

"We told you that after the President had spoken we would be glad, upon request from you, to allot time that in our judgment befitted the circumstances. Since the President delivered his message we have asked you to state your desires for such time, and you failed to do so. You, therefore, are wholly inaccurate when you try to present this incident in the light of a refusal of time on our part."

I felt this concession so unsatisfactory and hedged about that I did not immediately ask your System to allot us time that in your judgment befitted the circumstances.

However, in the course of the political campaign, which was opened by the President's Congressional broadcast, I shall hope that Republican speakers will receive comparable time at equally desirable hours over comparable stations, as may be granted to the spokesmen of the party in power. You will receive requests to this effect from time to time.

Yours very truly,

HENRY P. FLETCHER

*Chairman*

Republican National Committee.



*In order to correct some published inaccuracies and misconceptions which were formed in regard to Columbia's policy, Mr. Paley issued on January 15 the following statement, briefly summarizing some of the major points of issue.*

The Columbia Broadcasting System has not barred political broadcasts by Republican spokesmen or the spokesmen of any other party and it does not intend to. All Columbia has done is to refuse to accept money for such broadcasts. As evidence of this, Columbia's actual record, taking a period in recent weeks as an example, shows that from October 2 to January 4 the network presented 16 political addresses by Republican spokesmen and 13 by Democratic spokesmen. Forward commitments for the next few weeks schedule more Republicans than Democrats.

Columbia will continue in allotting periods to all parties for controversial issues to consider the public's desire for news, for education, for entertainment and all other ingredients of a well-balanced program structure. The network will continue to exercise its own editorial judgment with scrupulous fairness, never shutting out one side or discriminating in favor of the other. Columbia has adopted a policy of not selling time for the discussion of controversial public issues to advocates of any side of the issue, in order to keep discussion on the air from being dominated by those with the most money to further their causes.

In the case of political broadcasts, Columbia makes an exception after the conventions when candidates are actually campaigning for votes. This exception is made because the parties then want and are entitled to use amounts of time in regular series which Columbia cannot afford to give away. This has been the Columbia policy during the past three administrations.