

November 8, 2021

Sent via electronic mail

John T. Stankey
Chief Executive Officer
AT&T
208 S. Akard St.
Dallas, TX 75202

Bill Morrow
Chief Executive Officer
DIRECTV
2230 E. Imperial Hwy
El Segundo, CA 90245

Re: One America News Network

Dear Mr. Stankey and Mr. Morrow:

We, the undersigned 16 civil-rights, human-rights and media-justice organizations, call on you to end your business relationships with One America News Network (OANN). DIRECTV is the third largest pay-TV company in the United States. As one of the world's largest telecommunications providers and a majority shareholder in DIRECTV, AT&T plays a tremendously powerful role in connecting people around the world. We are deeply disturbed to learn that AT&T helped establish and fund OANN, a purveyor of racial bigotry, conspiracy theories and calls for anti-democratic violence that endanger lives.

We call on DIRECTV to stop carrying OANN.

AT&T, you hold a 70 percent equity stake in DIRECTV and appoint half of DIRECTV's board. Your equity interest brings with it tremendous influence. We call on you to do the right thing and demand that DIRECTV take all available means to end its relationship with OANN, so that its customers are no longer forced to subsidize hate and disinformation.

Earlier this month, Reuters released an investigative report¹ revealing that AT&T helped fund the inception of OANN. According to that report, OANN founder and CEO Robert Herring Sr. testified that the inspiration to launch OANN in 2013 came from AT&T executives. And in the intervening years AT&T has been a crucial financial lifeline for OANN to the tune of tens of millions of dollars. In his sworn testimony, Mr. Herring revealed that 90 percent of OANN's income comes from AT&T-owned TV platform DIRECTV. In fact, in 2020 OANN testified that its value "would be zero" without the deal with DIRECTV.

¹ "How AT&T Helped Build Far-Right One America News," *Reuters*, Oct. 6, 2021.

OANN has the right to air whatever content it chooses. However, AT&T's support for OANN runs contrary to its public commitment to equality given OANN's role in funding and promoting anti-democratic policies as well as its track record of providing a platform for disinformation and calls for acts of violence that undermine trust in our institutions.

We the undersigned urge AT&T and DIRECTV to reevaluate your business relationships with OANN moving forward for the following reasons:

1. OANN Undermines Democracy With Dangerous Disinformation About Election Integrity And Calls for Violence

Since its inception, OANN has provided an open platform for purveyors of disinformation to spread dangerous and hateful messages that undermine our democracy. From amplifying conspiracy theories to giving domestic disinformation agents a place where they may promote white supremacist talking points² to providing a supportive platform for Donald Trump and his administration, the network is a critical part of a far-right media system that peddles racist conspiracy theories³ online and off.

OANN is a major supporter of the Stop the Steal movement and is currently being sued by Dominion⁴ for spreading election fraud lies⁵ that claimed the 2020 election was stolen from Donald Trump. However, as bipartisan election officials across the country conveyed months ago: The 2020 election was not stolen from Donald Trump, and there was no evidence of widespread election fraud.⁶ Nevertheless, OANN has provided ongoing coverage of "fraudulent" results and played a role in fomenting the Jan. 6 deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. OANN is continuing to run content⁷ that spreads election disinformation and seeks to cast doubt over the results of the 2020 presidential election.

2. OANN Promotes Public Health Disinformation and Endangers Lives

Whether stoking violent calls for the attack on the U.S. Capitol or via its wall-to-wall COVID-19 disinformation, OANN is putting lives and our democracy at risk. The company has a history of featuring false information about the pandemic, which breeds distrust in public health officials and in the efficacy of the vaccine.

² "Far-Right OANN Anchor Jack Psobiec's Rise Tied to White Supremacist Movement," Southern Poverty Law Center.

³ "One America News Network," Media Matters for America.

⁴ "Dominion Sues Newsmax, One America Over US Election Fraud Claims," *Reuters*, Aug. 10, 2021.

⁵ Even before the election results and as early as November 5, 2020, OANN featured clips from Donald Trump's son, Eric Trump, calling the election victory for the former president. These news clips from OANN appeared on its YouTube channel, upon which the platform applied a label, pointing viewers to official election results as reported by the *Associated Press*. See "Facebook, Twitter, Youtube keep misinformation in check for now," *Bloomberg*, November 5, 2020.

⁶ "Mainstream outlets bury the lede on Arizona's sham 'audit,'" Media Matters for America.

⁷ "In aftermath of the bogus Arizona audit, OAN pushes for audits across America." Media Matters for America.

In November 2020, the OANN YouTube channel featured information about a guaranteed “cure” for COVID which YouTube flagged as violating its COVID-specific misinformation policies.⁸ YouTube suspended the OANN channel for the violation and remarked that the “demonetization of all OANN content will be permanent, unless the network addresses its issues.”⁹

3. AT&T’s Relationship to OANN Runs Contrary to Its Self-Proclaimed Commitment to Equality

AT&T claims to support racial justice: Your immediate past chairman and CEO made public statements following the murder of George Floyd calling for broader support from other corporate CEOs to “advance racial equity and justice.”¹⁰ However, AT&T’s concurrent support for OANN betrays this public claim of a commitment to equality.

The company cannot continue to talk out of both sides of its mouth. It cannot speak to promoting values of equality and justice¹¹ while also funding a channel spreading conspiracy theories and applauding insurrection. If AT&T is serious in its commitment to progressive values like racial justice, the company must reckon with its history¹² of supporting policies and actors that undermine the values it now promotes supporting, most immediately by not supporting or amplifying OANN.

We welcome the opportunity to brief the companies on the extent of OANN’s role in undermining democratic institutions and public health and safety at every turn. We call on DIRECTV to stop carrying OANN and for AT&T to do everything in its power to denounce and remove OANN from its lucrative platform.

Sincerely,

Free Press
Color Of Change
Common Cause
Decode Democracy

⁸ YouTube’s Covid-19 misinformation policies prohibit content that disputes the existence of the Covid-19 virus as well as content that discourages anyone from seeking out medical treatment, disputes guidance from local health authorities on the pandemic, or offers unsubstantiated medical advice or treatment. “OANN suspended from YouTube after promoting a sham cure for Covid-19,” *The Guardian*, November, 24, 2020.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ “AT&T CEO calls for racial justice in America,” CNN, June 16, 2020.

¹¹ AT&T Supports Advancing Equal Justice Reform, AT&T, March 4, 2021.

¹² “Tell AT&T to Stop Funding ALEC,” *The Nation*, March 27, 2012.

18 Million Rising
Friends of the Earth
GLAAD
Global Project Against Hate and Extremism
Greenpeace USA
Guns Down America
Kairos
MediaJustice
Media Matters for America
National Hispanic Media Coalition
Open MIC (Open Media and Information Companies Initiative)
United Church of Christ Media Justice Ministry