

Dems Blacken Eye Over Ad

By Susan Crabtree - Daily Variety

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WASHINGTON, DC --- CBS felt compelled to offer a detailed defense of its policy on advocacy advertising after Democrats on Capitol Hill drubbed the Eye net for refusing to air an anti-Bush ad during the Super Bowl.

"Given the misleading and inaccurate statements offered to the media and the public in recent days, it is understandable why there is confusion over the CBS Television Network's longstanding policy against advocacy advertising," CBS said in a statement distributed to media outlets.

Liberal grassroots political group MoveOn.org has spent the last two weeks pillorying the net for deciding not to air the winner of its Bush in 30 seconds ad contest, an ad titled "Child's Play" that criticizes the president for the ballooning budget deficit. Ad depicts children performing various manual labor jobs.

The group charges the net with playing political favorites because it plans to air a White House anti-drug ad during the Super Bowl. MoveOn campaign director Eli Pariser maintains that thousands of its members have called the net's corporate offices in New York to complain.

Tuesday night, Democratic members of Congress began to pile on.

"Since when has stating the truth ---an obvious truth at that --- turned out to be too controversial for America to witness?" Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) asked on the Senate floor.

MoveOn.org shows no signs of backing away from the issue. On Wednesday the group took out an ad on the op-ed page of the New York Times that argued the CBS snub amounted to

censorship. That same morning, 26 Democratic House members sent a letter to CBS Television chieftain Les Moonves asking him to reverse the decision and air the ad. The letter accused the net of playing favorites with the White House, which recently helped prevent CBS parent company Viacom from being forced to sell off some of its stations during a media ownership debate in Congress. Missive also referred to the net's decision last fall to cancel its Ronald Reagan miniseries after Republicans complained that some of content was inaccurate and offensive.

"The choice not to run this paid advertisement appears to be part of a disturbing pattern on CBS' part to bow to the wishes of the Republican National Committee," the members wrote in the letter, which was circulated by Reps. Maurice Hinchey (D-N.Y.), Bernard Sanders (I-Vt.) and **Jan Schakowsky (D-III.)**. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) wrote a separate letter to Moonves.

For the last two weeks, CBS has defended its decision in numerous interviews, and on Wednesday it provided a lengthy written explanation.

"The policy is decades old. It is designed to prevent those with means to produce and purchase network advertising from having undue influence on 'controversial issues of public importance.' From the network's perspective, we believe our viewers are better served by the balance and perspective such issues can be afforded within our news programming."

CBS also maintained that the policy only applies to network advertising, not to local time sold by network affils, who are free to accept or reject advocacy ads as they see fit.

In addition, net noted that conflicts over the policy go back decades, including flaps when CBS rejected ads from corporate giants Mobil Oil and W.R. Grace Co. and from groups promoting gun control and abortion.