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April 16, 2014

Professor Sig Gissler

Administrator of the Pulitzer Prizes

Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism

Pulitzer Hall, MC 3801

2950 Broadway

New York, NY 10027

Dear Professor Gissler;

In ABC's letter to you of April 15 regarding its alleged "omission" from the Pulitzer Prize winning entry for investigative journalism, Ben Sherwood makes a number of contentions that are factually incorrect. Here are some of the key points, with each addressed in turn.

ABC News implies that it participated for the entirety of the yearlong investigation. This is not true.

The Center's former executive editor reached out to ABC News about a possible partnership in October 2012, after Chris Hamby already had done initial reporting. But it was not until after an email sent by Chris to ABC News producer Matt Mosk detailing Chris's experience visiting a coal-company doctor that Matt responded in a March 8, 2013, email, "Brian wants to do this," referring to reporter Brian Ross.

ABC News' involvement in the months following the October 2012 initial contact involved Matt attending occasional background lunches set up by Chris with sources Chris already had spoken with repeatedly. Even after the March 2013 email, there were long stretches of time in which ABC News did not participate in the investigation because it was pursuing other stories.

ABC News contends that it played a vital role in shaping the direction of the series. This is not true.

First, it is important to note that ABC News chose to focus solely on one part of the three-part series. The network's primary claim is that it was responsible for the decision to investigate the role of doctors in the black lung benefits system. In fact, the medical issue emerged from Chris' reading of thousands of legal decisions and interviews with countless sources. Chris already was investigating specific doctors before ABC News even became involved.

ABC implies that they discovered Dr. Paul Wheeler of Johns Hopkins and obtained a key interview that the Center had tried unsuccessfully to arrange – both contentions that are completely false.

Chris identified Dr. Wheeler of Johns Hopkins as a key figure by examining thousands of legal decisions and speaking with countless sources. He first noted the potential newsworthiness of the involvement of Johns Hopkins. And he alone built the database that provided crucial evidence regarding Dr. Wheeler's readings.

After Chris and Matt discussed Dr. Wheeler, Matt suggested ABC approach Johns Hopkins. Chris agreed because of the greater level of planning needed for a television interview, rather than act as a middle man as technical arrangements were made.

Chris had not previously approached Johns Hopkins. But for his accommodation of ABC's particular needs, he would have. ABC seems to assume that this interview never would have happened without its involvement. That is simply not true. Further, Chris spent more than five hours preparing Brian for the TV interview, providing him with documents, data and medical literature and coaching him on medical technicalities.

ABC News lists what it contends are original reporting contributions. In fact, most of the reporting that ABC News did was repetitive or was undertaken solely for television purposes – and was not used in the print stories.

The letter that we sent to ABC News contains more detail on this point, but put simply: The entirety of the 25,000-word, the three-part series was written by Chris alone. He drew solely on his own reporting and interviews, with the one exception of the joint interview with Dr. Wheeler.

ABC News argues that it should be included because the bylines of Ross and Mosk appear on four stories.

As we have reminded ABC News repeatedly, the second installment in the series – “Johns Hopkins medical unit rarely finds black lung, helping coal industry defeat miners' claims” – was written entirely by Chris Hamby. He went through editing with Center editors and then shared the story with ABC News. Aside from minor wording changes suggested by lawyers for ABC, there were no changes to the story. This is documented in emails and saved drafts of the story. Brian and Matt did significant reporting; however, much of that was to meet the needs of a TV segment and did not end up in the Center's print story. The amount of reporting from them that made it into the story typically would warrant a credit line at the end. At ABC's strong request, however, we agreed to

place the names of Brian and Matt in the byline field, even though this report was fully reported and written by Chris. ABC News' claim now that they wrote this piece is a pure fabrication.

To put this more simply: The contributions of Brian and Matt do not come close to warranting a byline. We nonetheless inserted their names in the byline fields at ABC News' insistence because we hoped to foster a sense of trust and partnership. It is clear now that ABC News' intent all along was simply to attach their names more prominently to this story for use later in precisely the way it now is: as a weapon to wield in an attempt to claim undue credit.

And as we also have told ABC repeatedly, the remaining three articles with the bylines of Brian and Matt were follow-up stories, not part of the original three-part series.

A massive body of emails and draft scripts shows that Brian and Matt lacked understanding of basic facts and key concepts, even at the time of ABC's broadcast; that, rather than contribute as equal partners, Brian and Matt relied heavily on Chris; that Chris spent countless hours doing work specifically for ABC News' benefit – work that he otherwise would not have needed to do were he just preparing his print stories; and that Chris repeatedly saved ABC News from making embarrassing factual errors.

ABC news has never acknowledged its extraordinary reliance on Chris for even the most basic information about this highly technical and complex story. Chris, of course, has never complained to ABC News about this, despite repeated statements by ABC News on air, online and in press releases that erroneously made it appear as if ABC News was the driving force behind this project.

It is disturbing that ABC News now not only has failed to acknowledge Chris' indispensable work solely for ABC News' benefit, but has gone even further and suggested that the opposite is true – that the Center is downplaying ABC News' work. A mountain of evidence shows this is not true.

Sincerely,



William E. Buzenberg  
Executive Director

