

August 5, 2020

Chairman Ajit Pai
Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

I am writing to denounce a pattern of xenophobic and racist remarks broadcast on the television program “La Comay,” which airs on Mega TV Puerto Rico (Mega TV) from Monday through Friday at 5:55 p.m. The main character of this show is a puppet commonly known as “La Comay,” and is played by Antulio Santarrosa (also known as Kobbo Santarrosa). Between the years of 2013 and 2018, this show was off the air due to an unprecedented public outcry late in 2012. That year, thousands of Puerto Ricans boycotted the program—then called “Super Exclusivo—and its sponsors in response to scathing homophobic comments made by this character against the victim of a crime.¹ At that time, I joined thousands of Puerto Ricans in denouncing Santarrosa’s homophobic remarks.² On January 9, 2013, the show stopped airing on Wapa TV. The program made a comeback in 2018 and has been airing again on Mega TV.

Unfortunately, similar practices continue appearing on the show. Just last week, the program’s character made racist and xenophobic remarks against Senator Eduardo Bhatia and his wife, Isabel Fernandez. Specifically, the character stated:

“And let me tell you. I’m going to be real honest and sincere. I am and will always be Puerto Rican. I consume what my country produces. Now, I love and adore our brothers and sisters from other countries, but Puerto Rico has to be governed by a Puerto Rican man or woman.”

“Unfortunately, Eduardo Bhatia is from El Salvador. He’s Salvadoran and I prefer a Puerto Rican man or woman taking the reins of our country. For there to be a First Lady from Panama in Fortaleza, like Eduardo Bhatia’s wife, I would rather have a Puerto Rican woman instead, or have no First Lady at all in that case.”

¹ Publicist José Enrique Gómez Saladín was driving home after a work-related event in San Juan. He was carjacked and beaten to death and his body was burned in a shocking murder that has led federal authorities to take jurisdiction in the case. After taking up the coverage of the killing, La Comay hinted that the publicist got what he deserved for picking up male and female prostitutes in the street, an assertion that was never verified. These comments prompted the boycott. *See:* <https://nblatino.com/2012/12/05/ricky-martin-victor-manuelle-tweet-todos-somos-jose-enrique-after-puerto-rico-murder/> & <https://globalvoices.org/2012/12/12/puerto-rico-web-based-activism-calls-for-boycott-of-la-comay/>

² <https://velazquez.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/velazquez-condemns-gomez-murder>

*“Bhatia’s wife is Panamanian. He’s Salvadoran. Therefore ladies and gentlemen, little by little, [if we let this happen], who’s going to [call the shots] in this country? We consume what we produce domestically. Eduardo Bhatia’s father—he’s practically from Pakistan or India. In other words, there’s blood from over there—Pakistan or India running through Eduardo Bhatia’s veins etcetera.”*³

These statements are a direct attack to the immigrant community across the island and the United States. Puerto Rico has a vibrant immigrant population, with many hailing from other Latin American countries. This group of immigrants call the island their home and have historically contributed to the economic development of Puerto Rico. For a television character to imply or suggest that Senator Bhatia is not worthy of the highest office on the island simply because of his or his wife’s Central American origins is xenophobic and irresponsible. Differences in political opinion are no excuse for inappropriate or offensive commentary towards individuals based solely on their place of birth. Such actions are not representative of our American values.

Despite the disturbing nature of these comments, immigrants are not the only group targeted by this program. On June 13th, the same character made a racist remark against a candidate to the Senate of Puerto Rico, an attorney by the name of Ana Irma Rivera Lassén. The puppet mocked Ms. Lassén and portrayed her as an uneducated black woman by using a combination of gibberish and slang in incomplete sentences. One journalist noted, “[f]or non-Puerto Ricans, another way to compare this would be if a TV host in the United States decided to use racist stereotypes of Black servants in the South interacting with their white family.”⁴ After this incident, the Human Rights Campaign asked for the program’s cancellation⁵ and La Comay faced staunch criticism for her comments against Ms. Lassén.

Xenophobia, homophobia, and racism must not be tolerated or ignored. The use of such vitriol during a prime-time television show endangers the welfare of the island’s residents. I believe the FCC must ensure that any programs requiring FCC licenses do not unfairly target minorities or any protected classes under the law. Given the egregious nature of the remarks made by La Comay over the past two months, I request that your agency review the practices employed by this television show. Such vile rhetoric must be addressed head on to ensure the welfare of Puerto Rico’s residents and protect the island’s most vulnerable and traditionally marginalized residents.

³ Julio Ricardo Varela, Latino Rebels, Candidate for Puerto Rico Governor Says he will file FCC complaint against “La Comay” available at <https://www.latinorebels.com/2020/07/28/candidatelacomay/>

⁴ Julio Ricardo Varela, Latino Rebels, After mocking prominent black Puerto Rico woman, Calls to cancel La Comay, available at <https://www.latinorebels.com/2020/06/14/callstocancelcomay/>

⁵ <https://www.hrc.org/blog/campana-de-derechos-humanos-pide-la-cancelacion-del-programa-de-television>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nydia Velázquez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

CC: Raúl Alarcón Jr, Mega TV