

“STATEMENT OF CHOICE”

Opening Remarks by Jim Gosnell, President, Association of Talent Agents

Good afternoon. I’m happy to be here today in what I hope is a step closer to a new agreement that will go into effect on April 7, 2019 after the expiration of the current AMBA. As the president of the ATA, I wanted to say a few words of introduction to the ATA’s responses to the WGA’s proposals.

After ATA member agencies have met with hundreds of writers who write for television and movies, lawyers, managers and with other interested parties, we come to you with a solution to make our industry function more effectively and fairly for all.

One thing is certain. If we are to come up with a joint agreement, which I know our clients desperately want us to have, then we need to roll up our sleeves and get to work on a constructive process that will result in an agreement that works for everyone. We need to avoid the name calling and divisiveness that get us nowhere and will only set us back. Your agents are not your enemies, and they do not want to take advantage of you. If that were true, we wouldn’t be here today, and you would not be represented by us.

Today, we are going to provide you with a thoughtful response to your proposals. We agree on the majority of issues you have proposed. With some nuance, changes, additions and modifications, I truly believe we can come to a consensus. From diversity, to hostile work environments, to timely payment of writers, and writers not working for free – these are all issues on which we agree with you 100%... because they’re reasonable, make perfect sense, and are in the best interest of everyone concerned.

Today, we have come with written responses to your proposals but plan to focus most our time on the two main issues – packaging and affiliate production.

The research of our members has yielded similar data points. The highest-level guild members are doing incredibly well. The total number of overall deals is now close to double what it was in the previous three years, and some members of this WGA committee have achieved success like never before seen in our industry. They deserve and have earned their success. We are proud of them and our members are proud to be part of making these state-of-the-art deals.

But, unfortunately at the lower to mid-level, total writer compensation on a yearly basis feels stagnant and many are feeling left behind. We want you to know that we hear you loud and clear. There is income disparity not only in this guild, but in all the guilds. This condition is not limited to the entertainment industry; it’s in lock step with what’s taking place in our U.S. and global economy. But make no mistake,

it is not the result of packaging and affiliated production. In fact, the data is clear that writers working on agency-packaged shows make the same as those that are not working on packaged shows, but take home more since they do not pay a commission. So, the theory that agencies “sell out their clients on packaged shows” is not supported by the facts.

There are four major reasons why some writers are making less – consolidation, streaming, globalization and short orders. It’s an undeniable fact that most shows are 8 to 13 episodes. As a result, even as writers’ quotes increase, their take home compensation is either flat or down, simply because they’re working on fewer episodes with production schedules spread over longer periods. Conflating writer salaries being down with affiliated productions and packaging is not supported by the facts. Furthermore, to say that agencies can’t package or take sales fees on movies would shut down the independent movie business, as we know it. We don’t believe your members or you want that either.

What we will propose today is a reasonable, realistic and fair solution to a very complex issue – it’s all about choice and empowerment. It will enable writers to have a choice. It will take the power and put it into the hands of the client, which is exactly where it should be.

As I conclude, let’s continue to work together and partner on the real issue – better economics for writers. Let’s commit to serving them and fighting the conglomerates that are threatening their well-being – together. Let’s stop the daily press tactics, the threatening of guild members who don’t agree with the opinion of this committee, and the forcing of agents and clients to choose between guild or agency. We’re not asking our clients to leave their guild, and the WGA should not tell its members to leave their agents, many of whom have represented them for decades.

At the end of the day, the industry is looking to us to find common ground and to develop fair and reasonable solutions to these issues. They couldn’t care less about our bickering and unproductive rhetoric from either side.

The members of the ATA are committed to working toward that solution and don’t think we should leave this room without a clear schedule. We’re ready to meet every day for as long as it takes between now and April 6, 2019 to reach our new agreement – breaking into smaller groups as necessary.

With that, let me reintroduce my colleague Karen Stuart who will take you through the ATA’s new Statement of Choice and our responses to all your proposals, all of which are grounded in simple principles of transparency and disclosure. Thank you.