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October 16, 2000

**Statement of FCC Chairman William E. Kennard
Regarding *En Banc* Hearing On The
Public Interest Obligations of Television Broadcasters**

Thank you all so much for coming here today, and participating in the Commission's *en banc* hearing on the public interest obligations of television broadcasters.

Television is the most powerful and ubiquitous medium in the history of the world. Eighty-five percent of Americans watch local broadcast television every week. On average, children spend three hours in front of the television every single day. In sum, TV shapes our lives, our outlooks, and the ways our children learn. So, clearly, it is a medium that we all must care about, particularly at a time when the images bombarding our homes and our families seem increasingly more troubling.

I have received a lot of input during my tenure from parents and citizens who are concerned about the current direction of television. Broadcast standards have coarsened. There is indisputably more inappropriate content -- more questionable language, sex, and violence -- in today's primetime. Conversely, there are less public service announcements (PSAs) and less local and political coverage than ever before. And there is a strong sense of unease among minority communities that they are not being sufficiently represented on television in positive roles. All of these disconcerting trends speak to the question of broadcasters' public interest roles.

We all agree that broadcasters should serve the public interest, but we all have different opinions of what that means. In listening to the concerns of public advocates and broadcasters today, I am confident that this hearing will aid in giving the term "serving the public interest" more context and concrete definition. I believe "serving the public interest" should mean something that is clearly articulated and understood by all, especially by the public.

So, following this hearing, I will ask the Mass Media Bureau staff in the next two weeks to prepare a report based on the record developed today and in the Commission's underlying proceeding. I hope that from this record, the staff will be able to distill a set of principles for how television broadcasters can best serve the public as we transition to digital television. I'd like to thank the Mass Media Bureau staff, and in particular Julie Barrie, for working so hard to put this important hearing together

I look forward to hearing from the panelists today.

