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FCC CHAIRMAN POWELL LAUNCHES “LOCALISM IN BROADCASTING” INITIATIVE

Agency Actions Are Both Immediate and Comprehensive

Federal Communications Commission Chairman Michael K. Powell today announced a series of initiatives to enhance localism among radio and television broadcasters.

Powell said, “This past June, the Commission completed the most comprehensive review of its structural broadcast ownership rules in history. This twenty month study produced a balanced set of structural rules, faithful to the directives of Congress and the courts, to promote and protect diversity, competition and localism in the 21st Century broadcast media marketplace.”

“Our exhaustive ownership review demonstrated that the United States’ boasts the most diverse media marketplace in the world and is by no means concentrated and the rules adopted in that proceeding are well-designed to prevent any media company from having excess power over competition or viewpoints. During the proceeding and in the months that followed, however, we heard the voice of public concern about the media loud and clear. Localism is at the core of these concerns,” Powell said, “and we are going to tackle it head on.”

Powell continued: “It is important to understand that ownership rules have always been, at best, imprecise tools for achieving policy goals like localism. That is why the FCC has historically sought more direct ways of promoting localism in broadcasting. These include things such as public interest obligations, license renewals, and protecting the rights of local stations to make programming decisions for their communities.”

“The Senate Commerce Committee recently held hearings and brought greater attention to the issue of localism in broadcasting. I applaud the Committee’s efforts and hope to work in concert with them and the many Members of Congress who support localism,” said Powell.

“Toward that end, the Localism Task Force will advise the Commission on steps it can take and, if warranted, will make legislative recommendations to Congress that

would strengthen localism in broadcasting,” said Powell. The Localism Task Force will be led by FCC Deputy General Counsel Michele Ellison and Deputy Chief of the Media Bureau Robert Ratcliffe, who will serve as Co-Chairs. I want to thank Michele and Robert for heading up this important public initiative.”

“I also commend the commitment of my colleagues to the advancement of localism,” said Powell. “They have consistently shown a deep and unwavering commitment in this important policy area, and I look forward to working closely with them on this initiative. Given our shared commitment in this area, I am optimistic that we will reach consensus on how the FCC can promote localism by broadcasters.”

Following is more specific information on the “Localism in Broadcasting” initiative:

Speeding the activation of low power FM stations. The Chairman stated that he would shortly open a settlement window for low power FM applications. He announced that the Commission would waive its processing rules to permit mutually exclusive applicants to use all available frequencies to resolve conflicts and gain new station licenses. This settlement window will permit rapid resolution of hundreds of pending conflicting applications so these stations can immediately proceed to construct facilities and begin broadcasting.

The low power FM service rules, adopted in 2000, are designed to foster a fundamentally different kind of community radio service. These noncommercial educational stations serve neighborhoods, schools, churches, and niche audiences. The rules give licensing priority to organizations with an established community presence that pledge to provide daily local programming. They promote time-sharing among applicants and provide broadcast entry opportunities at costs far below those of conventional broadcast stations. This settlement opportunity could rapidly push the total number of outstanding LPFM authorizations to over one thousand by year end.

Localism Task Force. The Task Force will play a critical role in gathering empirical data and grassroots information on broadcast localism and advising the Commission on concrete steps that can be taken to promote localism. The Task Force will

- Conduct studies to rigorously measure localism and how it may be affected by existing FCC rules.
- Organize a series of public hearings on localism around the country.
- Advise the Commission on recommendations to Congress this fall relating to the licensing of thousands of additional low power FM radio stations.
- Make recommendations to the Commission within 12 months on how the Commission can promote localism in television and radio.

- Advise the Commission on legislative recommendations to Congress that would strengthen localism.

Notice of Inquiry. In September, the staff will deliver to the Commissioners a proposed Notice of Inquiry (NOI) on localism. This NOI will operate in parallel with the work of the Localism Task Force. The NOI will seek comment on a wide range of FCC rules and procedures aimed at promoting localism. The NOI will ask, among other things, whether various localism-based rules continue to work effectively and whether they should be changed or supplemented.

The inquiry is expected to address such longstanding areas as license renewals and network-affiliate rules as well as newer localism issues such as “voice tracking” on radio. The record developed from this NOI, in conjunction with the research of the Localism Task Force, will provide the Commission with a sound basis on which to comprehensively advance localism on broadcast television and radio.