

Minority Media and Telecommunications Council  
Keynote Speech  
July 19, 2005  
(as prepared for delivery)

Thank you so much for inviting me to keynote this year's Access to Capital Conference. It's a pleasure to be here to discuss the continuing need to assure that telecommunications industry ownership reflects the diversity of the American public it serves.

Some of you may remember that, when it comes to speaking at MMTC's annual financing conferences, I'm a repeat offender: it has been almost a year to the day since I addressed last year's conference. So perhaps the best way to begin would be to provide a brief perspective on what's happening on the media ownership front.

At our July meeting last week, the Commission was ready to consider a *Notice of Proposed Rulemaking* that would have reexamined the media ownership limits that the Court had struck down. I feel comfortable telling you that the *Notice* was very

comprehensive. It included virtually *every* substantive issue each Commissioner wanted to explore. It not only invited comment about the remanded rules themselves; it also sought input on related issues, like the effect ownership limits may have on the broadcast of childrens' programming, independent programming, indecent and violent programming. And of course, it sought comment on MMTC's proposals to enhance ownership opportunities for minorities and women.

At the eleventh hour, this item was deleted from the agenda because of our inability to reach consensus on certain critical procedural issues. As a result, further consideration of MMTC's proposals, along with the ownership rules themselves, must wait awhile longer. Chairman Martin is committed to doing what he can to resolve the outstanding issues so that the Commission can go forward in the process of reexamining its media ownership limits.

I wish I had more definitive news to give you on that front. But, lacking the ability to do that, perhaps you will allow me to update you on some of the other things I discussed with you last

year. As they say in Congress, I would like to “revisit and amplify my remarks.” That’s Congress-speak for a number of things, including “I want to hammer home something that’s become *really* important since the last time I spoke.”

And I do.

When I spoke with you at last year’s conference, I titled my remarks, “Diversity Is Good Business.” As I recall, my point was that fostering diversity in telecommunications industry ownership is a business imperative, as well as a worthy social and moral goal. Women make up a significant part of our society and the United States is becoming more multi-racial every day. To succeed, *all* telecom industries need to reflect the multicultural environment that we live in and that our children are growing up in.

For years the Commission’s focus has been on diversifying ownership in the broadcast industry, and of course increasing minority ownership of broadcast stations remains a vital concern. Broadcasting continues to be our nation’s electronic

mirror. It's the most local and the most *personal* of electronic media, reflecting the image of who we are and of what we think and feel as a people. From that perspective alone, diversifying ownership in the broadcasting industry remains a vital regulatory goal, and one the Commission must continue trying to advance.

However, in my view the large and varied number of new digital broadband voice, video and data services have joined, and perhaps even *surpassed*, broadcasting as a compelling focus of ownership diversification policy.

The reason for this is simple: these services are becoming critically important to our individual and national health and well-being; and services so important to all segments of our multicultural, multiethnic population should reflect that diversity in their executive management and ownership.

Multicultural America today is no different from generations past. Everyone who was born here, or who chooses to live here, shares the same common aspirations: to secure better jobs for

themselves, better education and healthcare for their families, and a better life for their children.

Advanced high-speed digital telecommunications services can give people today greater control over their lives and more power to determine their families' futures. For perhaps the first time, *we* will no longer be shaped *by technology*; instead, *every American will shape digital technology* to serve his or her own particular needs. High-speed broadband service will give all of us, regardless of race, age, location, or income, the ability to do more, earn more, and learn more.

This, I submit to you, is *true empowerment*. And it's not a momentary, here-today-gone-tomorrow thing. Combinations of wired and wireless voice, video and data services, custom-tailored to the varied needs of our diverse population, will enable digital services to continue helping to make all Americans prosperous, productive and safe.

Every day these Internet-based services are creating significant new entry opportunities for entrepreneurs who can see the

potential of new technology and harness it to serve the infinite variety of consumer needs and demands. As the Commission continues to open this new digital frontier, *all* entrepreneurs must be afforded a fair chance to stake an ownership claim, particularly those who have had the most difficulty in securing an ownership stake in the telecom industry to date.

I said last year that ownership diversity is good business, and when it comes to digital services it still is. As more small digital technology-based businesses proliferate, the more *all* businesses, big *and* small, will benefit from a greater choice in service options and pricing levels.

But the benefits of diversifying ownership in these new industries obviously flow beyond the new owners and their commercial counterparts. Ownership mirroring the diversity of the public it serves is our best guarantee that new services will be deployed to meet the many different needs of our increasingly-diverse society.

So, for those of you who came to this conference to learn about how to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities in telecom, I would paraphrase Horace Greeley and advise, “Go digital, young people; go digital.” Take the contacts you have made and the knowledge you have gained about business plans, financing, and the like and use it to explore opportunities in new wired and wireless broadband services, some of which do not even require an FCC license.

Does that mean that anyone still cherishing the dream of becoming a broadcast radio or TV owner should immediately give that dream up? Of course not. But even for you, a digital game-plan is necessary. Soon all television stations must convert to digital transmission, and that means all television station owners must have a realistic plan for using their six digital channels in a market dominated by hundreds of cable channels. And all radio station owners will need a solid plan for surviving competition from digital satellite radio providers like Sirius and XM, as well as from terrestrial counterparts.

But whether your entrepreneurial sights are focused on broadcast or nonbroadcast, analog or digital, the bottom line is this: the Commission can make opportunities available, but it cannot make you successful. And the proliferation of advanced high-speed Internet services that opens more opportunities for the savvy entrepreneur also makes it tougher to be successful in this new and still-evolving market.

Is it impossible to succeed in this environment? No. Will it be challenging? Yes. But with the input of MMTC and other parties, the Commission will do whatever it can to make sure you have every chance to succeed or fail based on the merit of your strategy, not the color of your skin. Beyond that point it'll be up to you.

But that's as it should be; you have never asked us to do more than that. And at the end of the day, all it takes is a small group of committed individuals to change the world. It's the only thing that ever has, and ever will.



So, to this small group of committed individuals, I give my thanks and continued best wishes for success in all you strive to do.