

Remarks to FCBA Scholarship Winners
(As Prepared)
Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate
June 28, 2006

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I want to particularly thank Michele Farquhar and all the members of the FCBA for the invitation to join you for the annual luncheon. Finally, congratulations to all of the scholarship winners here today and another thank you to the FCBA for helping these students to achieve their dreams.

I missed the college and university graduation speech circuit earlier this spring, so I thought I would take this opportunity to address my remarks to the students who are here today.

As you pursue your college careers, many of you may not realize how much the world has changed even in just the last ten years. At the heart of much of that change is communications. I recently have had an opportunity to visit both China and Alaska. Both visits demonstrated the powerful effect communications technology can have on peoples' lives. In China, technology was opening up a whole new era of economic opportunity, as well as exposing the Chinese people to new concepts that will hopefully lead to increased freedom and democracy. In Alaska, I saw first-hand how new technology was making it possible for even the most rural places to have access to better health care, new business opportunities, and quality education.

It's clear that communications technology is going to continue to be a big part of your lives. What many of you may not have realized is just how much of a role the FCC will play too. Put simply, the FCC deals with issues that affect the daily lives of every American. I wanted to take a minute to note a few things that the FCC has done in just the last few months that may have a profound affect on us all – as consumers, students, parents, and Americans.

- The FCC has recently handed down several decisions taking a tougher stand on indecency on broadcast television. Broadcasters have been given the use of a national resource – the public airwaves – and Congress has made the use of that resource conditional on broadcasting content appropriate for children and families. It's up to all of us as a society to work together to make television a positive force in the lives of our children.
- The FCC is continuing to consider how to strike an appropriate balance between promoting a diversity of ideas in the media and allowing businesses and consumers to benefit from a free market. Media ownership rules are going to have a profound effect on the marketplace of ideas, and it's important that consumers understand this debate and weigh in with their thoughts and concerns.
- As I mentioned, I recently returned from a trip to China where I met with my counterparts in the Chinese government. China is a growing economy, and the

United States needs to continue to look for ways to keep its competitive edge. At the same time, I was amazed to find that the Chinese regulators faced many of the same regulatory issues we are struggling with here in the United States.

- The FCC continues to look for ways to help promote the deployment of broadband. Broadband is spreading in the United States faster than the Internet, cell phones, VCRs, or color TV in the early years of their development. Part of that success is because at both the federal and state level the United States has made an effort to avoid regulation and allow the market to work. It's an approach that works – the National Telecommunications and Information Administration recently found that the FCC TRO loosening regulation resulted in more than \$6 billion in investment by Verizon and \$5 billion in investment by AT&T. That's \$11 billion of investment in America – by just two companies!
- Congress is considering the future of telecommunications as it drafts an update to the Communications Act. Many of the issues under discussion – net neutrality, franchise reform, universal service reform – will shape the future of this country, and I encourage you to follow the debate share your thoughts on these issues with your senators and congressmen.
- Finally, an independent panel convened by the FCC just last week released a report reviewing the impact of Hurricane Katrina on communications networks. Coupled with the creation of a new Homeland Security Bureau within the FCC, this effort marks a recognition of the importance of communications in an emergency and the role that the expertise compiled at the FCC can play in making communications more effective in those emergencies.

These are just some of the issues we discuss and debate every day at the FCC – among ourselves and among the many people represented here today at the FCBA.

Many of you will undoubtedly be interested in pursuing a career in this industry – as lawyers, CEOs, investors, or inventors. Even if you don't, you will certainly be using these technologies in whatever interests you do end up pursuing. In either case, it's important that you play a role in helping to shape this industry for the better.

As an FCC Commissioner, I have been given a great opportunity to play a part in this industry, and I see myself having four roles:

1. Commissioner. My first job is to do the job I swore to do when I became a Commissioner. That means I need to understand the issues we are talking about and make decisions that best serve the public interest. Serving the public interest is not just some sort of slogan at the FCC – it's written into the law that created the Commission more than 70 years ago.
2. Champion. It would be easy to get lost in the myriad of complex technical details of the issues we consider, but I think it's important for me to remember that I am

not just an FCC Commissioner but also a consumer like you. As a Commissioner, I need to be using these everyday experiences to help me be a champion for the thing consumers and parents need. I can never forget that deciding technical things like “allocating spectrum” might mean that when I drive through rural Tennessee, my cell phone might not work somewhere.

3. Educator. How many of you know how to use the V-Chip on your television? How many of you know what the ratings on television programs mean? How many of you know if your TV will still work when broadcasters switch over to digital transmission? The communications world moves so fast that it’s almost impossible for anyone to keep up with it. It’s important for policy makers to be educators. We have streamlined our consumer complaint forms, regularly participate in consumer education forums, and of course speak at events like this all across the country.
4. Facilitator. One of my first meetings as a Commissioner was with a group representing the television industry, advertisers, and advocates for children. I was pleased when they presented me with a proposal that they had worked out to address some of the issues the FCC is considering related to children’s television. I applaud the willingness of different parties with competing interests to get together to find a compromise that tries to benefit everyone. I want to help others do the same thing. There’s a good chance that the best solution to a problem is going to be a consensus solution that takes into account the concerns of all the parties.

I encourage you to take on these roles for yourselves and make a difference for your country. Be the lawyer who brings the cable industry and children’s advocates together and comes up with a way to make television a positive force in children’s lives. Be the doctor who suggests ways to use media to fight childhood obesity. Be the broadcaster who finds a better way to warn citizens in an emergency. Be the inventor who comes up with ideas that improve distance learning or provide better telemedicine. Be the investor who funds the next great idea that changes the way we talk to each other. Be the informed consumer who talks to your television station, your phone company, or your Congressman.

I recently wrote an Op Ed for the *Washington Times* about indecency on television and at the end I quoted from a speech by Edward R. Murrow in which he talks about what television could do for our society. His words are equally applicable to all technology: “This instrument can teach, it can illuminate; yes and it can even inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends.” What are *you* going to do to see that technology fulfills the promise that we all know it can have?

Thank you.