

STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER DEBORAH TAYLOR TATE

Re: Broadcast Localism, MB Docket No. 04-233, Report and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

In today's cross-platform, convergent mass media environment, ownership may be an imprecise measure of the Commission's major policy goals- competition, diversity, and localism. With the explosion of online news and information, diversity of voices no longer depends solely on the number of broadcasting companies or media outlets in a certain DMA. The Internet allows residents of even the smallest towns, with perhaps only one daily newspaper, to have access to hundreds of news outlets, twenty-four hours a day. In terms of purely local news and information, the opportunities for resource-sharing and capital investment that occur when a broadcaster purchases a newspaper, in fact often lead to more local news—not less. Specifically, three of the studies commissioned by the FCC in our media ownership proceeding, which were based on actual evidence from various areas of the country, showed that cross-ownership of broadcast and newspaper results in *more* local news.

However, as public servants we hold positions of public trust, and it is our responsibility to take heed of the public interest. Over the past four years, from October 2003 to October 2007, the FCC heard from citizens across this entire country, during 6 localism hearings in which hundreds of thousands of comments were compiled. Overwhelming concern about the lack of what is generally known as “localism” was expressed. This concept of “localism” has come to mean many things to many people. Historically, the FCC sought to preserve what we believe is true “localism,” by imposing public interest obligations on broadcasters, making license renewals contingent on fulfilling these obligations, and protecting the rights of local stations to air “programming that is responsive to the needs and interests of their local communities of license.”

In addition, many local broadcasters already seek regular public input and provide substantial hours each week for local programming, ostensibly based on dialogue with their local communities. In my hometown, *The Tennessean* announced just last week that it is forming several advisory groups to help better understand the news and information needs of the local community. Some of these groups will be organized by geography and some by subject. Much of the groups' discussions will take place online, allowing advisory group members to participate more easily, at any time and any place they are available. *The Tennessean* is also convening a group of local citizens with specific expertise in areas like urban planning, accounting, and the law, to provide advice on how to broaden and deepen their investigations and reporting.

In addition, local Tennessee broadcasters have also demonstrated interest in the needs of the community. They have hosted numerous debates—most recently in our mayoral election – and local political experts have regular shows to discuss issues facing the community. As a state official, I often participated in these “open mic” sessions in order to discuss consumer protection issues such as phone scams, or to educate our citizens on new programs like the Do Not Call or Do Not Fax registries.

The FCC should encourage local broadcasters to continue these practices and require those that do not, to start. However, I also think it is important for local news

outlets to establish processes that work best in their own communities, rather than being forced to implement an edict from Washington, DC.

In addition to these outreach measures broadcasters have undertaken to connect with their local community, the FCC just last month passed an order requiring that all television broadcasters make their public inspection files available online. This will allow citizens to get information about a broadcaster's community service efforts with just the click of a mouse, and will also save broadcasters time and energy in responding to in-person requests for station information.

The FCC has also expedited the settlement window for low power FM applications and continues to resolve pending applications to further their construction and broadcasting to local communities. This promotes a community presence which can provide daily locally produced programming at costs far below those of starting a full-power broadcasting station. I hope this will not only impact localism, but also provide opportunities for female and minority ownership.

Despite all that broadcasters are already doing, and the new requirements we impose today, this Order should not be viewed as a final step, but a progression. The Commission is **always** seeking public input and listening to public comment regarding how local broadcasters are meeting their goals. The use of the public's airwaves comes with weighty responsibilities and I will continue to encourage the furtherance of the goals of competition, diversity, and localism.

Thank you to all those citizens in every corner of America who have voiced their opinions on how to best achieve these goals, especially those in Charlotte, San Antonio, Rapid City, Monterey, Portland, and right here in Washington, D.C., both experts and laypersons. Thank you especially to those individuals who have served on our Localism Task Force during Chairman Powell's tenure, particularly co-chairs Michele Ellison and Robert Ratcliffe. Thank you also to the Media Bureau staff for organizing our localism hearings, and for continuing to focus our attention on what has been a cornerstone of broadcast regulation for decades.