

**Remarks of Commissioner Robert M. McDowell
National Religious Broadcasters Capitol Hill Media Summit
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As prepared for delivery

Thank you, Craig, for your kind introduction. I am honored to be part of your program this afternoon.

First, I'd like to give many thanks to NRB and its members for your efforts to help educate our fellow Americans about the DTV transition. During the FCC's DTV consumer education "blitz," I have been reaching out to religious broadcasters to help increase awareness. I've been heartened by religious broadcasters' diligence related to the DTV transition and I look forward to working further with you and with all broadcasters in this vital endeavor.

Serendipitously, today is Constitution Day. On September 17, 1787, the U.S. Constitution was ratified. It took until 1791 to ratify the Bill of Rights. First among those rights are those embodied in the First Amendment: the freedom of speech and the freedom of religion. It is these inalienable rights that lie at the heart of your missions as religious broadcasters. The freedom to worship without government interference is a right that continues to set us apart from so many other societies around the globe. Without a doubt, we are truly blessed to live in this great country.

As a result of being able to blossom under these freedoms, America's media environment is more robust and competitive than ever. You don't need me to tell you just how exciting – and challenging – a time it is to be part of the modern day media cacophony. At times the explosion of new content appears to be overwhelming: billions of new sources connected through the

Internet; hundreds of cable channels; even more content on satellite TV and radio; MP3 players; and, of course, thousands of radio and TV stations, plus much, much more. In fact, there's so much content out there that teenagers created a text messaging acronym to describe this information flood: "TMI," or "too much information."

Religious broadcasters are at the forefront of innovation when it comes to new media. Most religious radio and TV stations now also operate websites, and many stream programming to computers or deliver downloadable content for portable devices. I note that the "NRB Tech Lab" series of seminars slated for your 2009 convention will be devoted to analysis of the latest new media models for strengthening your ministries.

So in the context of this new media world, why are policymakers like us at the FCC unearthing decades-old mandates to re-impose on radio and TV stations? Didn't we think that they were safely slumbering away in their crypts for all eternity? Why is the FCC considering overburdening the traditional electronic media precisely at this crucial moment in history when broadcasters face more competition than ever before?

This apparent new era of media re-regulation is troubling in several respects. For starters, with top-line revenue falling, I know that many small broadcasters can ill afford to shoulder the costs of obligations that were deemed obsolete years ago.

In fact, just last month I had the pleasure of traveling to North Pole, Alaska where I spent some time with a small broadcaster – the Evangelistic Alaska Missionary Fellowship, licensee of KJNP-TV, which kindly hosted me on one of its talk shows to discuss the coming DTV transition. KJNP, which also operates an AM and an FM radio station, has to be the most northern religious broadcaster in the United States. What's more impressive is that it operates its

three stations almost exclusively with volunteers. Its TV station has been digital for some time and its radio operation is moving toward digital briskly.

But I have to ask, in this era of a seemingly infinite number of new media voices, why should KJNP – or any other broadcaster who struggles to remain viable in the digital age – be required to shoulder regulatory burdens that no longer serve their original purpose? Perhaps a case could have been made decades ago for thinking that each broadcast station should broadly serve all the content needs of all listeners and viewers in its community at some point in the broadcast day. But even if that notion made sense back then, how could the return of old mandates like ascertainment and exhaustively categorized program reporting ensure that consumers today get everything that the *government thinks* they need to see and hear – when consumers now have so many more media options other than broadcasting?

I know that during our panel discussion we'll address several of the troubling initiatives that the Commission has before it – such as the Enhanced Disclosure and Localism proceedings – so I'll save the specifics until then. But I will note now that these proceedings, and several others, seem based on the premise that broadcasters have more power, and therefore need more regulation, than ever before. I disagree with that premise.

Thank you again for having me, and I look forward to your questions.