

**REMARKS OF COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS
MEDIA OWNERSHIP WORKSHOP SCHOLARS' PANEL
WASHINGTON, DC
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Good Morning and welcome to the launch of the 2010 Quadrennial Review of the Commission's Media Ownership Rules. I am pleased to see this illustrious panel here this morning and to know that other promising media observers will be here tomorrow and the next day to share their thoughts about the scope and framework for the review that must be completed next year. I especially extend a hearty welcome to my friend Harold Furchtgott-Roth who had the unique privilege of ruling on these issues as a former FCC commissioner. Thanks for joining us, Harold. I don't have full confidence that Harold and I will end up in exactly the same place on all this, but I do have full confidence that whatever Harold has to say will be intelligent, considered and completely sincere. I am also happy to see my new friend, Paul de Sa, in the moderator's chair this morning. That makes me a lot less worried than I used to be about pre-cooked media ownership studies, ideological posturing and not enough consumer and citizen input into our deliberations.

The pessimist in me this morning says, "Here we go again. Another Media Ownership Review; another opportunity to turn things around that doesn't get the job done; another proceeding that raises people's hopes only to squander one more time the chance to advance the public interest."

But then the optimist in me says that times have changed; new leadership has come to Washington; and the public interest once again gets favorable mention (except out there on the fringes where strident voices try to shout down reasoned civic dialogue). There is, finally, some chance to correct the things that have gone so badly awry.

With these hearings, we embark upon a Congressionally-mandated review which is intended to provide the FCC and the public with a vehicle by which to assess the media landscape, take the temperature of what is really going on across this country, and identify what modifications to those rules, if any, are warranted. It's an important review, and one that we, as an agency, need to make certain is open, transparent and goes out of its way—*way* out of its way—to ensure the broadest possible participation by any citizen who has an interest. And, as we know from the last couple of times the Commission did this, a *lot* of citizens have an interest. Their input wasn't reflected—in fact, it was seldom even mentioned—in the items the Commission approved, but that wasn't the citizens' fault—it was the Commission's. As some of you may know, I have pushed very hard over the years to open up these media ownership proceedings and to incorporate citizen input into our deliberations. It is long past time for this agency to acknowledge the pervasiveness of media and how radio, television and newspapers touch the lives of *all* Americans. Well, I'm happy to see that under this chairman, we are coming to the realization—as we did during the DTV Transition earlier this year—that the FCC is preeminently a consumer protection agency. If we are really going to be an agency *for* the people, our decisions need to be nourished by input *of* and *by* the people.

So it is heartening to see that, in addition to filing comments, members of the public can watch these workshops online, and hopefully they will soon be able to communicate with us via a media ownership “blog” like we’ve put up for our broadband planning.

Let me turn now to the substance of why we are here today. Many of you know where I stand. Broadcast ownership policies are supposed to encourage three essentials: localism, diversity and competition. In recent years, we have been moving in the wrong direction on all three. Our broadcast media is less local, less diverse, and less competitive. Years of evidence available to—but largely ignored by—the previous two Commissions demonstrate rather clearly that the tsunami of media ownership that has flooded our media environment for the past two decades has kicked the traces out from under all three of these essential qualities. So too has sloppy Commission oversight. How much evidence do we need that, long before the current recession, newsrooms were shuttered, broadcast journalists laid off, investigative journalism downgraded in some places almost to the point of extinction, independent companies bought up willy-nilly, local musicians and art and culture swamped by a tide of nationalized, homogenized monoprogramming?

So, my friends, start off with the evidence we already have and then ask the new questions you need to ask. What’s happened since our last ownership proceeding? Not just to the industry, but to consumers and citizens. How has the emergence of new media impacted the old? Does the Internet change the ownership equation and, if so, how? Has private equity ownership complicated the Commission’s job of safeguarding the public airwaves? Is it really the intent of the law to permit banks to own broadcast stations?

The Quadrennial Review takes place, of course, amidst the profound effects the economy is having on the state of America’s media. Most of these financial impacts cannot be—should not be—resolved here at the Commission. I’m the first to recognize that the economy continues to affect the health of broadcasters and newspapers and to influence their business choices. These hard times will, inevitably, pass. So I hope we will be super-careful to make sure that we don’t overreact to the down period we are in while ignoring the implications of what we do for the long-term development of our media.

Another word of caution: let’s not draw too clear a line between traditional and new media because the media environment evolves over time, traditional media is not about to disappear, and the American people will, for years yet, get the bulk of their news and information from television and newspapers—directly, of course, but also from the websites of their local papers and TV stations. Focusing only on the potential of new media is not going to repair the problems of the old. Consolidation and an inability thus far to support the infrastructure of in-depth news-gathering and analysis can be as much of a problem on the Internet as in traditional newsrooms. So let’s be careful not to consign old media to the dustbin of history yet because, in many ways, newspapers and

television will remain the foundation of our civic dialogue. Let's take extraordinary care that we do not allow the sins visited upon old media to be cast upon the new.

Speaking of industry consolidation, I don't believe it's over yet—not by a long shot. We're already beginning to see some indications of consolidation reborn, and my prediction is that once the economy rebounds, we will see all sorts of deal-making and clever stratagems to realize those ever-elusive “economies of scale” that Wall Street analysts love to talk about, even as so many of the mergers and acquisitions generated by that talk continue to unravel.

But let me caution—as strongly as I can—against using the Quadrennial Review process as the one-and-only venue to address all the many media concerns and issues before this Commission. We have several other proceedings—already launched, commented upon and based on solid records—that should not be pushed aside by this new proceeding.

The sad state of minority and female ownership of America's broadcast media has been teed up—and it deserves action now. We have recently received several very good recommendations from our Diversity Advisory Committee on full file review and updating our *Adarand* studies in order to encourage greater broadcast ownership by women and minorities. I believe we have the ability—strike that, the **obligation**—to address these issues on their own and not in the Quadrennial Review which is, by its very nature, a protracted proceeding. In years past, our efforts to spur ownership diversity have been half-hearted at best. Now it's time to act.

The localism proceeding was launched in 2003, the record has since been refreshed, and it, too, deserves action now. We issued a Localism Report in January 2008, and not much has been done in the interim. Loud voices are trying hard to make “localism” a dirty word. It's not. Localism is about people in their communities and making sure that our broadcast media spend some time covering what is going on in those communities—local news and information, local music, the diverse groups that live there. Some shout “communism” from their perches—as if people who are fed up with so much nationalized, homogenized monoprogramming, disgusted at shuttered newsrooms and the lack of local music and community events, turned off by a dumbed-down civic dialogue, are somehow un-American.

For openers, I support further action on the standardized disclosure form the FCC adopted so that citizens can know precisely what broadcasters are doing to serve their communities. Broadcasters, citizen groups and the FCC should be working on ways to implement a practical and not unduly burdensome disclosure item. Another example: there is no reason that a citizen should have to go down to the broadcaster's studio during business hours and sit in a room in order to review paper public files. That information should be available on the Internet and at the FCC for all to see. Here, too, public interest reform shouldn't have to await a new proceeding.

And then there is the crying need for a respectable and credible re-licensing process. Developing some modest—and historically precedented—public interest guidelines so that broadcast licensees have to do more than send in a postcard once every eight years to have their licenses renewed should be at the top of the FCC’s list of things to do. It is not unreasonable that broadcasters should be expected to make a credible demonstration that they are serving their communities of license—their local and diverse communities of license—if they wish to continue using the public’s airwaves.

History has provided us with a golden opportunity now to tackle and resolve long-delayed issues. Such opportunities don’t come around very often. But the fact is that opportunity is here—now. How long it will last is anyone’s guess. Some will try to outlast the opportunity, to delay and obfuscate while they pray for the return of the Old Order. I intend to do everything I can to ensure that we realize the promise of this moment.

On the Quadrennial Review, and on the other proceedings and issues I have mentioned, let’s resolve—all of us—to give them our best shot, to make them the priorities they are, and to ensure that the American people have a media environment worthy of this great democracy. We are all stakeholders in this, and each of us is entitled to a voice. We need everyone’s help. Start with broadcasters themselves. There are many broadcasters around the country who labor day-in, day-out to serve the public interest. Some of them do an incredible job, and we should realize they do so in an environment made horrendously difficult for them by the tsunami of industry consolidation and the shortfalls of government over the past too many years. Less and less are these broadcasters masters of their own fate; more and more have they become captive to the unforgiving expectations of Wall Street speculation and hyper-consolidation far beyond their control. This is the time for broadcasters who feel this way to join the dialogue.

During the next three days we will hear from consumer groups, public interest organizations, advocates, academicians, labor, business and others. Then I hope the Commission will take to the field in the few months just ahead to hear from stakeholders across the land. In the few hearings we held leading up to the nearly disastrous attempt in 2003 to eviscerate most of the Commission’s media ownership rules, and again in those leading up to the more surgical strike in favor of expanded newspaper-broadcast consolidation that we endured in 2007, way more than three million people contacted Washington to let us know how they felt about those efforts. Most didn’t feel very good. And, as some will recall, my colleague Jonathan Adelstein and I went everywhere we could across the country to attend town hall meetings and dozens of open forums to hear from as many citizens as we could. So let’s take the record we have, supplement it where necessary, ask the new questions that need asking, and all the while conduct an expeditious but thorough conversation with those who know the situation best—our television and radio audiences.

As we set sail today to tackle media ownership, let us resolve to make this the urgent priority it must be and also, I ask my colleagues, to move full speed ahead on the

other pending proceedings—minority and female ownership, localism, and the public interest—so that we can do justice to America’s media needs. As the old adage has it, justice delayed is justice denied.

Thank you again, each and every one, for being here today and giving us your time and the benefit of your advice and counsel. You make an important contribution and I am grateful for it.