



NEWS

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See MCI v. FCC, 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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**COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS
ON THE FCC LAUNCH OF INITIATIVE TO EXAMINE THE FUTURE OF MEDIA
AND INFORMATION NEEDS OF COMMUNITIES IN A DIGITAL AGE
JANUARY 21, 2010**

Our democracy relies on a well-informed citizenry. The founders of this great nation understood this early on. So they worked, and generally succeeded, in finding ways to deploy critical news and information across our young Republic so citizens could make informed decisions. Now, as we begin crossing into the new frontier of digital democracy, it's time to heed the founder's wisdom and realize we're falling behind the mark they set. Everywhere around us are signs that the news and information journalism America relied on for so long is failing us today. Investigative journalism is, most observers agree, an endangered species. Newsrooms are shuttered, newspapers closed down, broadcast and newspaper journalists fired. The victims, just as much as the out-of-work journalists, are you and me, because we increasingly lack the journalistic nourishment that feeds democracy. In a country where watchdog journalism is absolutely essential, more than two dozen states don't even have one reporter accredited to cover Capitol Hill. At the state level, legions of lobbyists far outnumber professional journalists by orders of magnitude. What we have here, recalling that famous line from "Cool Hand Luke," is a failure to communicate. We all love opinion journalism and partisan advocacy, no matter where we may align ourselves on the political spectrum. But opinion founded on opinion is not the same as opinion founded on hard facts, and it is *that* kind of journalism which is no longer coin of our realm.

The Internet may one day open new avenues to support the kind of in-depth journalism America needs. It has already lowered the barriers to enter the playing field so that any individual can tell a story with a camera phone and an Internet connection. But having one's voice widely heard is something else, as is supporting expensive investigative journalism of the kind that nourishes democracy's dialogue and holds the powerful accountable. Even with all the promise of new media, we need to remember that without content, there is nothing to aggregate, and without intelligent debate on critical issues stemming from insightful journalism, the promise of a smart phone is short-circuited. So far, new media has not replaced what we've lost by way of traditional media's decline. Most indicators show three-quarters or more of the news, delivered to the public in all forms, originates from traditional media--newspapers and broadcast. So we confront a two-pronged challenge--ensuring that the broadband of the future

can support the information infrastructure which democracy requires and, for the years immediately ahead, stemming the hemorrhage of contemporary journalism.

I am very pleased that today the FCC launches an examination of the state of journalism. Its aim is to understand exactly what's going on, why it happened, and what our citizens think can be done about it. I have been pushing for this for a long time, convinced that nothing the Commission is doing in any area rises to a higher level of importance than this. Plus, it's our job to do this--the public interest requires no less. So this Notice very properly launches a comprehensive examination of the state of broadcast media today and, more generally, the availability to Americans of hard-hitting news and information of civic importance from broadcasters as well as other media sources, both traditional and new. We look to better understand industry trends; business models; the mechanisms of support for investigative journalism; the factors—both private sector and public sector—that have brought us to the present state; and our options for dealing with all this.

I look forward to a thorough but also expeditious assessment. This problem is urgent and solutions are needed now. Enduring 5-10 years more of the present journalistic decline is not an option America can afford. I note that a lot of great work—studies, reports and analyses—has already been done. Additionally, the Commission already has far-reaching records on many of these questions through proceedings past and pending. So our Notice needs to build upon this work, with a sense of urgency that the present situation compels.

As the FCC convenes hearings, workshops and virtual debates, we need to ensure that the voices we hear are not just the media stakeholders, but more importantly the citizen stakeholders, who are the greatest beneficiaries of a functioning media and a functioning democracy. I hope everyone with an interest will express that interest and help inform the record we will be compiling.

I thank Chairman Genachowski for initiating this Public Notice and I look forward to working with him, and all of my colleagues, on this proceeding.

We have many challenges before us here at the Commission. None of them trumps, or even matches, this one. At stake is the civic dialogue upon which the future of our democracy rests.

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