

**STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS
ON REPORT FROM STEVE WALDMAN ON FUTURE OF MEDIA
FEBRUARY 18, 2010**

I want to express my personal gratitude to Steve Waldman for the work he's doing to examine the present state of journalism and its future. This is an issue that is not only near and dear to my heart, but one that goes to the very heart of our democracy. At its best, journalism asks the right questions and knows where and how to find the answers. It holds the powerful accountable by providing citizens an accounting. It is democracy's watchdog. As we move forward in this work, it is only fitting that we have someone here at the FCC with the mission of asking the difficult and encompassing questions and reaching out to stakeholders all across the land to develop some answers. The country is in serious need of a robust national dialogue about what we expect of our journalism media going forward in this era of great technology and economic change.

I can think of few, if any, challenges more central to the future of our country. In fact, I can think of none. You've heard me talk many times before about where the past three decades of media consolidation by the private sector, aided and abetted by this Commission's wholesale decimation of public interest oversight, have left us in terms of actual news. Watchdog journalism is a shell of its former self. It's dying in traditional media and unable to find oxygen in the new. The road we're traveling is inflicting irreparable harm not just on our media, but on the citizenry that media has an obligation to inform and enlighten.

So I am grateful that we are at long last, after a sojourn of many years in a strange ideological wilderness, asking how well the public interest is being served currently by traditional media, and equally appreciative that we are beginning to examine how the public interest can be served in the new digital era.

I am pleased that the Chairman has initiated this proceeding and tasked Steve with shepherding us to some real and timely outcomes. The recent Public Notice which examines the future of media information needs in communities across the country demonstrates to me that Steve takes his assignment with the seriousness it warrants and deserves. I am looking to him to press the issue hard and to press each of us to meet this challenge head on, with the priority and the sense of urgency it so clearly merits. I look forward to my colleagues and me joining Steve in events around the country to learn first-hand what people are actually experiencing—or not experiencing—when it comes to news and the media. A formal FCC hearing, or two, would be welcomed.

Of course, we already have a hefty record on much of this from our previous media ownership and localism hearings, so we're nowhere near starting from scratch. But it will do us all good to see for ourselves and to update the record in the weeks and months ahead. And, to be sure, there are new questions to ask and new facts to gather.

Time is not our friend here, however. Journalism's decline moves measurably forward by the month, so this is not the time for a long, drawn-out process, and I believe

Steve agrees with that. With journalism's fuel tank fast approaching "empty" in so many localities, a leisured pace would only make an already dangerous situation totally untenable. This Commission has a responsibility to keep that from happening.

So the future of journalism begins now. Now is the time to strengthen traditional media and now is the time to make sure that new media, as it takes on ever-larger responsibilities, serves the public interest and nourishes the democratic dialogue that our best leaders have worked for since the time of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. They knew they had to get this issue right—and I hope we are beginning to understand that, too.

I was reminded recently of the import of journalism, particularly the investigative type that keeps government and businesses accountable to its citizens. I was speaking with Brian Ross, the great reporter for ABC's Investigative Unit, who—along with the *Los Angeles Times*—broke the story on the Toyota gas pedal defect. A very tough question to consider—and certainly worth asking every time you get into a car: How long would that story have been buried without hard-working journalists digging in the right place? It almost didn't happen but for a handful of investigative journalists who, thank goodness, remain on the beat. Now it's our turn to be on the beat.

A great American who I got to know after I came to the Commission, the legendary Walter Cronkite, once said. "America is a powerful and prosperous nation. We certainly should insist upon, and can afford to sustain, a media system of which we can be proud." That's at the top of my list of things to do in the months ahead. And I've got high expectations for Steve and for all of us as we step up to the plate.