

**Prepared Remarks of Chairman Julius Genachowski
Federal Communications Commission**

“From Wasteland to Broadband: A Conversation with Newt Minow”

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Thank you Frank for that introduction

Thank you to our hosts: the National Press Club’s Eric Friedheim National Journalism Library and the George Washington University Global Media Institute.

Thank you all for coming.

We have many distinguished guests today.

None more so than Newt Minow’s remarkable family.

The Minows are so vital a national resource they’re usually not allowed to be in the same place at the same time. But, for this, we’ve made an exception.

Newt’s incredible wife Jo is here. And we’re joined by Newt’s brilliant and dynamic daughters: Mary – a leading expert in library law, Nell – a national leader in corporate governance, as well as “The Movie Mom”; and Martha – the Dean of Harvard Law School, my professor, mentor, and friend.

The truth is, for all Newt Minow has achieved professionally, I’m sure he’d say raising his three daughters with Jo is his greatest accomplishment.

This *is* a special day, and I’m truly honored to introduce Newt Minow on this historic occasion.

Newt Minow set a standard for excellence at the FCC that inspires and guides us a half-a-century later.

Newt Minow was 34 in 1961, when President Kennedy appointed him as the FCC’s 14th Chairman, the youngest in agency history.

There have been 27 total FCC Chairs. And none has been more successful.

As FCC Chairman, Newt Minow shifted and improved the communications landscape in so many important ways. Bringing UHF reception to all TVs, recognizing the opportunities of pay TV, and promoting the development of public broadcasting.

And as Virginia Heffernan said in the New York Times this morning, Newt Minow inspired – or provoked -- so much of the great television that emerged in the years after his tenure, from Sesame Street to 60 Minutes.

Less well known, but powerfully important: Newt Minow also paved the way for communications satellites. On this too, he had conviction that was visionary.

True story: Newt Minow once told President Kennedy that putting communications satellites in space was more important than putting a man on the moon, because “satellites allow ideas to be sent into space, and ideas last longer than men.”

His time at the FCC was just one chapter in a remarkable American life.

Born in Milwaukee, Newt Minow enlisted to fight in World War II when he was 17. His mother pleaded for him to wait until he was drafted; Newt replied, “What will I tell my grandchildren?”

After his FCC service, he moved to Chicago -- and his accomplishments continued.

As Chairman of the Board of PBS, Newt helped grow public broadcasting into a service that exemplifies TV’s potential.

As President of the Carnegie Corporation, he helped get the original funding for Sesame Street.

As Chairman of the Commission on Presidential Debates, he is recognized as the father of those debates, first proposing the idea in 1955, and helping keep them alive to this day.

And he has the mysterious title of Honorary Consul General of Singapore.

But for all the amazing things he's done, and for all the time that's elapsed since he was at the FCC, Newt Minow still can't escape ... The Speech.

And there's no need to.

Because Newt Minow's speech on May 9, 1961 is as relevant today as it was 50 years ago.

Despite the revolutions in technology that have occurred since 1961, despite the dramatic shifts in the way that we receive and exchange content and information, the principles and values in Newt Minow's famous speech endure.

Keep in mind that 1961 itself was a period of tremendous change. May 9th, 1961, was just a couple of months after John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as America's new President – propelled into office by the power of a new technology called television and the promise of a New Frontier.

Only four days before Newt's speech, Alan Shepard had become the first American in space.

Into this scene stepped a 35-year-old FCC Chairman barely on the job. And the speech was his *first* public speech as Chairman.

Well, of course, the speech became one of the most important speeches in the history of communications, if not beyond, with that most memorable description of TV as a “vast wasteland.”

The speech resonated across the country not just because of a catchy phrase, but because Newt Minow articulated what a lot of people were thinking, and offered the promise of a better future.

His challenge to broadcasters to do better and his optimism and vision for harnessing the power of television technology inspired people throughout the nation.

Also, his chutzpah.

You don't have to take my word for it.

We dug into our archives at the FCC to get a sense of what people thought of Newt's speech when he delivered it.

With help from volunteers at the National Archives, we learned that more than 4,000 people wrote to the Chairman in the months following the speech – with the overwhelming majority writing to say that the Chairman's leadership was refreshing and gave them hope.

An Episcopal Minister wrote: “Your superb speech yesterday is in many ways the most encouraging note yet sounded even in a new administration so full of encouragement.

An executive wrote, “I haven't felt so encouraged about our country since the days when FDR was making speeches.”

A woman from Westwood, New Jersey wrote: “Where have you been all these years?”

Together with The National Archives, we've created a compilation of the letters. And Newt, after my remarks, I'd like to present this collection to you as a gift from the FCC on this notable occasion.

Now, no question, the speech was a big deal. But we don't celebrate the speech today just because it got a lot of attention in its day.

We celebrate the speech because of its enduring message.

Newt Minow's speech wasn't just a speech about a point in time; it was a speech for all time.

It wasn't just a speech about a particular communications technology; it was a speech about all communications technologies.

The speech recognizes throughout the power of communications technology. Newt spoke of “the technological knowledge that makes it possible, as President [Kennedy] has said, not only to destroy our world but to destroy poverty around the world.”

The speech explicitly imagines a future where broadcasting and communications technology will tie together “Indiana and India,” “Chicago and the Congo”.

CNN hadn't been invented, but between the lines in that speech you can see a vision of broadcast and cable networks providing programming and connections, education and information around the world.

You can see a vision of new services like Twitter and Facebook and search engines and mobile phones helping connect and empower people -- and helping open closed societies.

What Newt Minow said in 1961 applies to all those involved in *today's* communications technologies: You must "serv[e] the people and the cause of freedom. You must help prepare a generation for great decisions. You must help a great nation fulfill its future."

I see the straightest of lines between Newt Minow's 1961 speech and his recent article in the Atlantic, in which he wrote: "The next 50 years will see even more technological miracles, including the marriage of computers, television, telephony, and the Internet. What we need, to accompany these changes, are critical choices about the values we want to build into our 21st-century Communications system – and the public policies to support them."

Newt Minow said it 50 years ago, he said it last month, and it bears repeating: we need to harness the power of technology for the benefit of all people --- to advance the cause of freedom at home and around the world – to help our children fulfill their future; to help our great nation, fulfill its future.

We need to harness the power of communications to provide opportunity, grow our economy; improve education, health care and public safety; promote civic engagement and strengthen our democracy.

What better agenda could there be for the FCC today. And who better to articulate it than Newt Minow.

Newt, you continue to inspire us every day.

And we know you're just getting started.

If I could refer to one more of the letters sent to you at the FCC back in 1961: "Good luck – God speed – and Go Get 'em."

Please join me in honoring Newt Minow and welcoming him to the stage.