

**REMARKS OF COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS  
OWNING OUR AIRWAVES  
CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY  
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Thank you very much for that kind introduction. Thank you everyone for being here. It's good to see my former FCC colleague, Jon Peha, who served for a time as our Chief FCC Technology Officer and who has an amazing array of knowledge about our new digital world. It's wonderful to be back in Pittsburgh and back on the beautiful campus of Carnegie Mellon University, where we've held hearings before. And what a great and special honor it is to be here with my friend and your Representative in Congress, Mike Doyle. I could use up all my time talking about the good things this good man has done for Pittsburgh, for Pennsylvania, and for the nation across a huge gamut of public policy issues. My beat is, of course, communications, and here Mike Doyle has been the champion of community media, Low Power FM, broadband for everyone, and a media that fosters localism, diversity and competition. Thanks to his determined leadership, Congress passed and the President signed into law the Local Community Radio Act last December. This law will turn the potential of Low Power FM into reality across the nation—and that's wonderful news for those of us wanting more local input, more diversity, and more life in our local media. I'll tell you this—when the going gets tough, there is no one I would rather have at my side than Representative Doyle. Mike, it's an honor to share this platform with you tonight. Thanks for inviting me.

The best part of my job over these past ten years has been the chance to attend public forums like this and hear directly from consumers and citizens what you think about the state of America's media—and your local community's media. I remember a number of years ago when the FCC Chairman at the time wanted to make major changes to the media ownership rules to help a few big special interests buy up more and more independent local outlets, and he and his team seemed to think that people didn't care much about these issues. These were Inside the Beltway issues, they thought, too technical for people to get, not of any interest to the public. Boy, were they wrong! My colleague Jonathan Adelstein and I insisted on having hearings around the country, and when the Chairman wouldn't go along with our request, we held our own and piggy-backed on town hall meetings being held by members of Congress and citizen groups. In hearing after hearing, in city after city, from coast to coast, we heard from the public. Long into the night people testified to the major problems they had seen in their own communities. And here's the kicker—*three million* people wrote to Congress and the FCC saying “No” to Chairman Powell's rules—thumbs down. Congress went to work to overturn the rules Powell had forced through the Commission on a 3-2 vote, and then the Third Circuit Court here in Pennsylvania sent them back as deficient. A movement was born. A mission was created. The word went out again: citizen action counts. Even in these times, when so few special interests wield so much outrageous influence, concerned Americans can still make a difference. That's why I'm here tonight. Because while we kept the worst from happening back then, we still haven't created a media climate worthy

of our country's needs and our country's citizens. And I'm convinced it won't happen without real citizen action—from you, anyone you can influence, anyone you can talk to, write to or somehow communicate with. If we are to ever have media of the people, by the people, and for the people, you need to take this fight on.

The stakes could not be higher. I truly believe what is on the line is the continuation of our self-governing democracy. If we are denied quality news and information, if we are denied in-depth investigative reporting, and if we are denied a media environment wherein independent voices can speak and be heard, then we won't be able to sustain an informed electorate.

As a Commissioner at the FCC, I have been pushing to ensure that each and every citizen of this nation has available the news and information they need in order to be contributing participants in the affairs of the nation. But without a serious national effort and significant policy changes, our media environment is only going to get worse. That means even more media outlets in fewer and fewer hands. Media consolidation continues—just this year we've seen Comcast-NBCU, Citadel-Cumulus, and now Sinclair buying up more stations, for just a few examples. It means more glitzy infotainment masquerading as real news. It means more reporters walking the street in search of a job instead of walking the beat in search of a story. It means a crippled and stunted small “d” democratic dialogue.

Some would have you believe all will somehow be right. New media—broadband and the Internet—will replace traditional newspapers and broadcast news. Now I'm the first to welcome the new opportunities created on the Net and the lowered barriers to entry it is capable of providing. But when you look at the top 20 news sites on the web, it is, by-and-large, the same song from the same big media players who have a hefty percentage of the audience's eyeballs. The overwhelming bulk of the news we get—well over 90 per cent—continues to originate from newspaper and broadcast journalism. The problem is: there is so much less of it. According to a new study by scholar Matthew Hindman, 98% of local news *on the web* originates from traditional news outlets, and local news online accounts for less than one-half of one percent of all page views.

So online news has not plugged the gap left behind by the erosion of traditional journalism. And, all the while, traditional journalism shrinks. Hundreds of newsrooms have been shuttered; tens of thousands of reporters laid off; bureaus at home and overseas closed down; hundreds of thousands of stories that should have been told have gone untold, uncovered, unheard. The mission of journalism to hold the powerful accountable is a shell of its former self. State capitals go uncovered, with many more lobbyists than reporters. In Washington, more than half the states don't have a single reporter accredited to Capitol Hill. How's that for holding the powerful accountable?

An FCC staff report this summer highlighted some of the ills our media is suffering from. One-third of local broadcast TV stations do little to no news, the report said. As an often-accepted practice, institutions pay stations for favorable coverage,

including a hospital that paid a TV broadcaster \$100,000 for some positive stories. The FCC Report was informative but, unfortunately, its recommendations were weak—far too weak to make a real dent in curing what ails the media. What was missing from the recommendations section was any hint of the boldness we need if we are serious about righting the many media wrongs we see around us.

One of the potentially useful recommendations to come from the report was the call for greater disclosure. Now I am all for disclosure and in fact voted for enhanced disclosure back in 2007. What the report recommends is that stations' public files be moved online, instead of being accessible only at broadcasters' studios, so that citizens curious about how broadcasters were fulfilling their public interest obligations could easily access the files. But—and this is a big but—let's keep in mind that disclosure and transparency are means to an end—not ends in themselves. Providing only the files, without providing the means to deal with any problems that are uncovered, or with any citizen complaints that develop, defeats the whole purpose of disclosure. It's like a doctor identifying your symptoms but then prescribing no medicine.

Here's a better idea. Instead of the current FCC rubberstamp license renewal process, wherein every eight years a broadcaster sends in his application and we grant it without doing any serious review about the station's public service performance, how about a policy that demands licensees to renew every three years and we take a good, hard look at the licensees' records and match them up with some guidelines to demonstrate they are providing your communities with real local news and information, that they are reflecting the diversity of all your media market's citizens, that they are open to the expression of diverse viewpoints, and that they are actually talking with people in their communities of service about the programs people would like to see and hear and the issues that are important to them? Is that asking too much? I don't think so. And, if we find that a station is not serving its community of license in a significant way, then let's take that license and give it to someone who will. With that kind of approach, I don't think it would take very long for the word to go forth that the FCC is back in the business of enforcing the public interest.

Well, I get enthused about this subject and I could go on and on, but we want to hear from our panels and hear from you, so I'll close with one final plea: We need to be a news-literate people, we need to be an informed electorate, and we need to be informed enough to deal with all the really tough and dangerous issues hurtling at us right now. We've got some really serious challenges out there—to our economy, to our ability to compete in the modern world, to educate our kids, to care for our health, to protect our planet, to open the doors of opportunity for every American. We won't get it done without citizens armed with the facts and knowing—really knowing—what's going on out there—in their local communities, their nation, the huge threatening world around us. The premise of our democracy is a well-informed citizenry.

This is not a new challenge that we face. It's as old as America. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison talked about it. They knew they were embarked on a risky experiment—preserving the fragile young republic they had fought

for and won. Our Founding Fathers knew how important the spread of information was to the success of their experiment. They wrote a First Amendment to ensure that the American people would be informed. They built postal roads and subsidized the costs of distributing newspapers so that citizens everywhere in the land would have the news and information they needed in order to make good decisions for the future of their young nation. They built the information infrastructure of early America. Now we are called upon to do that again—to provide ourselves with the tools we need to sustain self-government and to safeguard and prosper our nation. We need to be information infrastructure builders just like the Founders were information infrastructure builders. I don't see any greater challenge facing us today because so much rides on how we decide. The thought I want you to take home with you tonight is that this issue ought to be at the top of your list of things to fight for, because the resolution of all the other challenges I have mentioned depends upon our knowing and understanding them—and that means our media. I am leaving the FCC soon—but I am not leaving this fight. When you leave this hall tonight, I hope you'll join me.

Thank you very much.