

**REMARKS OF COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS  
FORUM ON INFORMATION NEEDS OF COMMUNITIES  
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Thank you Dean Callahan and the Cronkite School of Journalism for hosting us this morning. Thank you Chairman Genachowski for holding this Forum. Thanks everybody for turning out so early at what may not always be a normal campus hour. And a special thanks this morning to my friend Steve Waldman for his work at the Commission over the past two years. The study which he and his team put together shines lots of lights into just about every corner of American media and clearly documents that all is not what it should be. And while it is rather common knowledge that my own set of policy recommendations to deal with these problems is somewhat more vigorous, Steve's report is a very valuable contribution to the nation's dialogue on the future of our media. I join in thanking him for his work.

I had the good fortune to call the namesake of this fine school, Walter Cronkite, a friend. I met him early on in my first term and when I told him the concerns I had with our media, he told me he shared many of the same worries. We visited several times and I came out of each get-together appreciating his wisdom, his commitment to real journalism, and his practical good judgment. The last time I saw him was at a media ownership forum at Columbia University. I had asked him to join us there, but he returned from Europe just the day before with a serious eye problem and he was scheduled to go to the hospital the day of the forum. I thought he'd cancel—but he came. He came because he cared. That's the way he was.

We shared a vision, I believe, of how media should be serving our citizens and our democracy. We understood that an informed citizenry is the prerequisite of self-government. And we agreed that a deadly poison of financial speculation, bottom-line economics, and government abdication of its public interest responsibilities had laid huge swaths of America's media low. And it only got worse. Today, the media we depend upon to inform our democracy has one foot in the traditional newspaper and broadcast newsroom and one foot in the new media of the Internet. The traditional media has been cut to the bone in order to deliver greater dividends to shareholders. Hundreds of newsrooms have been shuttered; thousands of reporters walk the streets in search of a job rather than walk the beats in search of a story; investigative journalism is on life support; and every day, hundreds of stories that should be reported go unreported. Real news has been too often replaced by fluff. Democracy is not well-served by fluff. New media, of course, holds tremendous potential with its low barriers to entry, its lack of printing costs, and its ability to flash news from around the world in moments. But it has come nowhere near to filling the holes left in the wake of traditional media's ills. In spite of the innovation and creativity we see, there is still no new media model to fund the kind of investigative journalism that the country must have. In fact, scholars tell us that more than 90% of the news on the Internet originates from those newspaper and broadcast newsrooms—there is just so much less of it.

I have been pushing to ensure that every citizen in the land has available the news and information they need to be contributing participants in the affairs of the nation. To me that means from time to time saying “No” to the continued onslaught of mega-media mergers. That means ensuring a relicensing regime for broadcasters that would redeem the premise and the promise of broadcasting—broadcasters serving the public interest in return for free use of the public airwaves. Walter Cronkite told me what an important role the presence of the FCC—an FCC that just might be checking a station’s performance—meant in encouraging the environment wherein the great generation of Edward R. Murrow journalism could do what it was capable of doing. Dan Rather, Marvin Kalb and Ted Koppel have told me the same thing. It means stepping up to the inexcusable shortfalls in minority and female ownership. It means a truly open Internet. It means being really aggressive about safeguarding the public interest. It means providing this nation with the information infrastructure it needs if we are going to overcome the unprecedented challenges our country faces today. We fool ourselves if we underestimate the extent of those threats. They are deadly serious and they will not be resolved if our news diet is fluff alone.

One of the recommendations in the report that I throw my full support behind is the need to teach news literacy. This can be a powerful antidote to the dumbing-down of our civic dialogue. Our democracy requires a well-informed, news-literate society that can differentiate between fact and opinion and good sources from bad. There are many innovative endeavors underway, but they are scattered and uncoordinated and we need to focus on bringing the public and private sectors together to develop an online news literacy curriculum that can be available across the nation. The FCC is part of an interagency process looking at digital literacy. I'd like to see that process focus on a goal of getting a news literacy curriculum developed and online in 2012.

So there is much to do. For the country to do, for the FCC to do, for all of us in this room to do. Change is always difficult, and when it involves true reform, powerful forces can be counted on to oppose it. But our history tells us that we *can* overcome. The FCC has, right now, an opportunity to make a real difference. Yes, by spear-heading a true national dialogue about the future of the media, all across the land. But also by using the authority we have--right now--to advance the public interest. But remember this: windows of opportunity can close, and they can close a lot faster than they were opened. So let's use our opportunity well— boldly, quickly and decisively. As our friend Walter said that day at Columbia, “America is the most prosperous and powerful nation in perhaps the history of the world. We can certainly afford to sustain a media system of which we can be proud.” To that I say: "Amen."