

**REMARKS OF COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS
FUTURE OF MUSIC COALITION
WASHINGTON, DC
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What an incredible tribute. Thank you, Future of Music Coalition, thank you Michael Bracey—for this and for everything you do to help musicians and to help your country, thank you to everyone involved with making that spectacular video, thank you all for being here. For me, this is right up there with that wonderful night in Madison, Wisconsin eight years ago when we launched the “To Tell the Truth” tour with Billy Bragg, Steve Earle, Tom Morello, Lester Chambers and a whole host of musical talent; and also up there with that night several years ago when I actually got to speak from the stage of the 9:30 Club when you and a raft of public interest groups came together and brought the fight right here to Washington, DC. I’m almost—but not quite—speechless. So thank you everyone for something I will always remember and always cherish.

It makes me feel proud and challenged—and I hope you feel proud and challenged, too. Proud because you, your music and your organization made a difference. You came together to reverse the FCC’s awful proposal to further weaken our media ownership rules in 2003 so that a few media moguls could gobble up more and more of our broadcast stations. Remember that? Chairman Michael Powell thought he’d just do an “Inside the Beltway” job on that because no one outside Washington really cared. You folks went out and sang the truth and told the truth and all of a sudden 3 million people outside the Beltway showed they did indeed care by contacting the FCC and Congress saying what a terrible idea those rules were. Then the Senate struck his rules down, the House moved against them, and the Third Circuit Court sent them back to the FCC with a little sign that said “No way. If you’re going to mess around with the rules, do it the right way, not this way.” That was grassroots citizen action at work.

You came together again in the cause of an open Internet with Rock the Net, Pearl Jam, R.E.M., OK GO and Erin McKeown, among many others, singing about it and working with your sister and brother consumer advocacy organizations to mobilize the grassroots again. And, together, you made some—not enough, but some progress—not everything we wanted but enough to build on until we can get the stronger rules we need. Suddenly something called, very inelegantly, “network neutrality” was a national issue, debated in Congress, talked about on the Presidential campaign trail, and acted upon by the FCC. That was grassroots citizen action at work.

More recently, we all came together again in the great and wonderful cause of Low Power FM radio. We had a leader in Congressman Mike Doyle and thanks to him and Senator Maria Cantwell and our good friends in the Prometheus Project and many of you here this afternoon, Congress this past December passed, and the President of the United States signed into law, The Local Community Radio Act. It’s going to mean more local programming, more local news, more local music. Give yourselves, and Mike Doyle, a big hand on that one! Low Power to the People! How about for the next stop: Full Power to the People!

You know, sometimes in this world where so few special interests wield so much outrageous power, we're tempted to throw up our hands and ask, "What's the use?" I don't buy that. I say: Citizen action can still work. I say: It's the only way *real* reform ever comes to America. I say what generations of reformers—abolitionists, civil rights crusaders, women's rights champions, consumer advocates, disabilities activists, labor unions, media rights defenders and a host of other reformers said: "We *can* make a difference. We *will* make a difference."

I'm here today to call on you again. I believe the biggest media challenge of all is calling us to action. I believe it may be reformer's—all reformers'—greatest calling right now. Our media is in trouble and America is in trouble—and the plights of both are inter-connected.

For more than 30 years, our media—newspapers, radio and television—have traveled down a perilous and poisoned road of hyper-speculation and fevered consolidation, buying up hundreds—thousands—of formerly local, independent outlets and then, to satisfy the debt-holders, gutting newsrooms, firing reporters and putting investigative journalism on life support. They replaced real news with glitzy entertainment and facts with opinions, most often loudly-shouted. They took local and regional music off the air and replaced it with stultifying, creativity-killing playlists and national music homogeneity. And they ignored the wondrous diversity that existed in the communities they served. Even those station owners who tried to resist—and there were many who did and who still strive to do their job—came under often-irresistible pressure to cave. Too often the old ideal of stewardship, of using the people's airwaves to serve the people's interest, was pushed aside. Today the speculative fires burn on. And our democracy suffers. Why must there be allegations of phone-hacking and bribery before we ask how much media power is too much?

To make it a perfect storm, this private sector debacle was blessed, even encouraged, by the public sector. This is the saddest part of the story. The place where I work—the FCC—was at the center of it all, blessing the consolidation orgy and making it worse by eliminating almost all of the public interest guidelines and enforcement that we had—rules and procedures that had been fought for and won by generations of media reformers. And, when new media and the Internet came along, the two previous FCCs helped the big companies travel down the same misguided road that radio, TV and cable had gone down—consolidation blessed by government with no real public interest oversight.

So to make a long story short, we find ourselves in 2011 with radio and TV news and information shells of their former selves, shilling programs that encourage a dumbed-down civic dialogue based on nothing more than fluff. Democracy is not well-served by fluff.

Right now, your country and mine faces deadly serious challenges. Our economy founders, our global competitiveness has lost its edge, nearly a fifth of the workforce is

un- or under-employed, our education lags and our teachers suffer as much as the kids, 50 million Americans have no health insurance, and our children enter a world more challenging than the one where you and I grew up. If we don't have a media that can dig for facts, cover all these beats, separate fact from opinion, and hold the powerful accountable, then tell me please how in the world are we going to meet and master these challenges? How are we going to overcome? To me, getting our journalism and our media right is Step Number One in getting our democracy right.

So here are a few suggestions. How about the FCC just saying “No!” to some of these god-awful media mergers? How about an FCC that looks at a radio or TV station's performance for the people before it renews their license—and if we find someone isn't doing their public interest job, we give the license to someone who will? How about positive action on some of the many proposals presented to the Commission to enhance minority and female ownership of America's media properties? I still don't “get” how we can truly reflect this country's awesome diversity if media is owned and operated mostly by white males. And how about more teeth and more certainty in guaranteeing that an open Internet will be there for us and our kids five, ten and twenty years down the road, instead of risking the cableization of perhaps the most opportunity-creating technology in all of history?

Let me be very candid. Two years ago, I thought we would be well on our way to a better media landscape by October 2011. We had a new team in town, majorities where we needed them, and opportunities galore to correct the often horrendous media mistakes of previous years. To be sure, we have made progress—real progress—in broadband, on a number of good consumer proceedings, and we have a more open and transparent Commission. But on these issues so critical to the future of our democracy—fostering a media that fosters democratic dialogue and self-government—we can't seem to get to any decisions, even though we have the authority to do many of the things I've mentioned. Some of it is disagreement over the nature of the crisis and I can understand that, but I think most of us two-and-a-half years ago thought they recognized the depth of the problem and wanted to take it on. Some of it is the entrenched power of incumbent interests with their armies of lobbyists and lawyers. And some of it is a media that so often seems just plain oblivious to what's going on around us. Whatever the cause, the hopes we harbored and the dreams we dreamed of a better media seem little closer to realization now than they were then.

So that brings it all back to where democratic change starts—where it always starts. It brings it back to the people. Back to you. If I've learned anything over 40 years in this city, it is that change—real change—comes from the heartland, from the grassroots. It comes from people speaking out, singing out, organizing, marching, demanding action. Leaders, even the great ones, then become the instrumentalities for those democratic strivings. Historian Eric Foner rightly points out that even the greatest leaders seldom act simply on their own volition. Lincoln became the Great Emancipator, FDR the formulator of the Second New Deal and John F. Kennedy a protagonist for civil rights because they were “pressured to change by engaged social movements—abolitionists, the labor movement, the struggle for racial justice.”

Prodding from the heartland. Pressure from citizens who come to see the value of organized, collective action. If we want a media that can help put America back on the right road, we—you and I—have to fight for them. Commit on the issue, put shoulders to the wheel, speak out, sing out, write about, gather people in the tent, march, petition, and make yourselves heard as never before.

Can it be done? Of course it can. That's how we built the country, after all. Nothing has changed. So if you're already enlisted—and I think most of you are—you're at the right place at the right time with the right issue. If you're not already enlisted, this is your moment. As for me, while I will be leaving the Commission later this year, I'm not leaving these issues. I could never do that! I'll be there with you. You know, I can't really sing—but when you're out there and you turn around and see this retired Commissioner out there with you, let him join the chorus or provide some back-up and join in singing the music of democracy. Together, we can build the media America needs—media of the people, by the people and for the people. How better to redeem the promise of America?

Thank you very much.