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For Immediate Release

FCC GIVES NONCOMMERCIAL STATIONS GREATER FUNDRAISING FLEXIBILITY

Relaxed Rule Helps Noncommercial Broadcasters Support Other Non-Profits

WASHINGTON, April 20, 2017 – The Federal Communications Commission today voted to relax its third-party fundraising restrictions to permit many noncommercial television and radio stations to air limited fundraisers for the benefit of other non-profit organizations.

Noncommercial educational broadcasters (NCEs) – such as public and religious broadcasters – have long been free to solicit funds to support their own operations, including through program-length fundraising events. However, until now, such broadcasters could only conduct on-air fundraising for third parties if they received an FCC waiver or the fundraising activity did not alter or suspend regular programming. Historically, waivers were temporary and given only after a crisis or natural disaster.

Today’s action relaxes these rules to permit NCEs to devote up to one percent of their annual airtime to fundraising for third-party organizations that qualify as tax-exempt non-profits under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, without having to first seek a waiver from the FCC. This will allow NCEs to raise money for worthy causes, such as disaster relief and assistance for the poor, while educating their audiences about important issues. Stations that engage in this type of fundraising can only be reimbursed by the third party for their expenses directly related to the fundraiser. NCEs will also have to run on-air disclosures explaining that they are raising money for a third-party. These clear limits aim to protect the unique noncommercial and educational nature of public broadcasting.

Additionally, the new rules exempt NCEs that receive funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). These stations argued in the public record of this rulemaking that they are in a different position from other NCEs and would not benefit from this additional flexibility. Today’s action brings to a close a rulemaking effort started in 2012.

Action by the Commission April 20, 2017 by Report and Order (FCC 17-41). Chairman Pai and Commissioner O’Rielly approving. Commissioner Clyburn concurring. Chairman Pai, Commissioners Clyburn and O’Rielly issuing separate statements.

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