

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER JESSICA ROSENWORCEL,
DISSENTING**

Re: *Implementation of Section 621(a)(1) of the Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984 as Amended by the Cable Television Consumer Protection and Competition Act of 1992, MB Docket No. 05-311, Third Report and Order (August 1, 2019)*

Do just a bit of research on the state of local journalism in this country and you will see stark headlines with words like “decline,” “shrink,” and “crisis.”

These headlines are not fake news. According to the Associated Press, more than 1,400 cities and towns across the United States have lost a newspaper during the last decade and a half. This trend extends beyond newspapers. Over roughly the last decade, newsroom employment—the reporters, editors, photographers, and videographers who work day-in and day-out to publish, broadcast, and report local news in this country have declined by 25 percent.

This downsizing deserves attention. While national news is on many of our screens, local journalism is disappearing. This has consequences. The loss of a local outlet means there is no one to report on the day’s events. Coverage of the school board doesn’t take place. Highlights from the local football game go unreported. Investigations into property assessments and local corruption fall by the wayside. But these are the facts that keep us informed as citizens and provide us with the news we need to help make decisions about our lives, our communities, and our democracy.

I think this context matters—and this context is important for today’s decision. Because this agency should seize opportunities to reinvigorate local newsgathering and community coverage. In fact, that has traditionally been a hallmark of Federal Communications Commission media policy. But on that score, today’s decision misses the mark. That’s because it cuts at public, educational, and governmental channels across the country. It goes beyond placing reasonable limits on contributions subject to the statutory franchise fee and jeopardizes the day-to-day costs, like staff and overhead, required to run such stations.

I’m not the only one with this concern. Take a look at the record. We’ve heard from thousands of communities across the country worried we are cutting the operations of so many local channels. I am saddened that this agency refuses to listen.

I think their pleas fell on deaf ears because this agency has convinced itself that by making these changes, we will see more broadband. They insist that funding these local stations and related efforts damages the ability of our nation’s broadband providers to extend their networks to communities without high-speed service. But comb through the text of this decision. You will not find a single commitment made to providing more broadband service in remote communities. There is no enforceable obligation to expand broadband capacity. There is no agreement that any savings from today’s action is pushed into new network deployment. I fear this absence speaks volumes.

That's because in the final analysis, this decision is part of a broader trend at this agency. Washington is cutting local authorities out of the picture when it comes to infrastructure. You see it here, in the way we limit local public, educational, and governmental channels and public safety services like I-Nets. You see it in the way we cut local officials out of decisions about wireless facilities deployed in their own backyards. You see it the way that just last month we preempted a local law designed to increase broadband competition in a city where residents were crying out for more choices for internet access.

I don't think this is the way to govern. I believe the way we are proceeding is at odds with our long legal history and tradition of dual sovereignty in the United States. I think instead of speeding our way to the digital future, it is slowing us down, increasing our division and diminishing the dignity of local institutions. I dissent.