

**REMARKS OF  
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS  
WILLIAMS & CONNOLLY CELEBRATION OF DIVERSITY  
WASHINGTON, DC  
JULY 25, 2019**

Good evening, everyone. I'm Geoffrey Starks. I want to start by thanking Williams & Connolly for having me here tonight, but more importantly for having this conversation and for hosting a Celebration of Diversity. I am a proud W&C alum. Right before I left W&C after three-and-a-half years, I got to try two cases with another associate over two weeks – back-to-back trials out at Montgomery County. My partner supervisor was Malachi Jones. We took both to jury verdict and won both cases. I went back and looked at the announcements that Malachi sent firm-wide that afternoon – he wrote: “Justice was served today in a Rockville courtroom for our client . . . the prosecutor claimed that Joselito ran away from a jaywalking stop and dropped a package of drugs while in flight. One officer claimed he saw the whole thing. The jury was persuaded otherwise once they found out that this officer tried to taser Joselito for jaywalking! That's right. Be careful when you cross the street in Wheaton.”

Malachi, thank you for your long-standing guidance and mentorship, and I'm glad that you are the Chief Diversity Partner. It is important, and W&C could not have chosen better.

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I was confirmed by the U.S. Senate earlier this year, and sworn in as an FCC Commissioner a little less than six months ago. In that time, I've had the honor of serving the American people and listening to their concerns across a wide range of issues. One issue that's always been important to me is advancing diversity in media, and I'd like to say just a few words on the subject tonight before we hear from this impressive panel of experts.

Media is about more than just entertainment or conveying information. What we see and hear, and who we see and hear it from, impacts the way we view our world, our society, and ourselves.

I think we all long for a future where “diversity” in media isn't just a success story, but the story. A future where kids like mine turn on the TV or the radio and are no longer surprised to see and hear folks who look like them and who tell their stories. A future where having diverse voices is so commonplace that it becomes unremarkable. If we're going to make that future a reality, it is critical that our media landscape reflects the diversity of our population at every level. And, for far too long, the numbers haven't been where they need to be.

I've given this issue a lot of thought since I joined the Commission, as many others have over many years – decades even. It is clear from our guiding statute that the FCC has a large role to play in this space, as it distributes licenses to broadcasters. First and foremost, ownership of the outlets that control these licenses sets the tone at the top of the organization, and I don't need to tell you how bad the ownership numbers have been for many, many years.

In the United States, we have over 1,300 full power TV stations. 1,300. According to the FCC's latest numbers – which, by the way, are becoming increasingly outdated and in need of an update – just 12 of those stations were owned by African Americans. Not 12 percent. 12. Asian Americans owned just 10 stations. Latino and Hispanic Americans own less than 5 percent of

stations, and women, who make up more than half of all Americans, represent less than 8 percent of station owners.

Moving the needle on broadcast ownership hasn't been easy. Spectrum is a finite resource, there are a limited number of channels in each market, and access to capital can be a big obstacle. The average radio station costs a million dollars, and the average TV station costs 53 million dollars. If we're going to make more diverse ownership possible, we need to do more to ensure that new entrants can get into this space by ensuring that they have access to capital and that they have access to opportunity – in other words, making sure more deals come their way.

As we address diversity in ownership and management of media outlets, we also need to make sure that there are women and people of color both behind and in front of the camera so that the stories being told are shaped and informed by a broad range of voices. Obviously, there's a danger here if women and people of color aren't being involved in providing relevant news and information to their own communities. But this goes beyond just a corporate responsibility issue. It's also good business. There are untapped markets in this country, and if the box office success of hits like last year's "Black Panther" or "Crazy Rich Asians" teaches us anything, it's that these folks have money to spend and a desire to see themselves and their experiences reflected on screen.

In one of my first votes as a Commissioner, I observed that the FCC was failing to make good on its statutory mandate to collect workforce diversity, or EEO, data from broadcasters. For nearly twenty years the FCC has been asleep at the wheel when it comes to collecting this data. I've worked to try and re-open this issue, and I will continue to do so going forward.

Broadcast is still the gold standard in reaching the most people, but it is undeniable that the Internet is a powerful outlet. The internet has lowered barriers to entry and allowed more and more voices to bypass traditional gatekeepers, including diverse voices. Where once you needed a studio, expensive camera equipment, and a broadcast license to reach an audience, today you need much, much less. The potential here for diverse voices to thrive is immense, but only if we keep a close watch. Going forward, we need to make sure that the internet remains free and open so that internet service providers don't become new gatekeepers, putting up unnecessary barriers for content creators and limiting the kind of content all of us can send and receive online.

The internet also can't help to promote diverse voices if those voices can't get online. Or if the audiences they hope to serve aren't online. Diversity is directly linked to broadband access and affordability. Internet inequality is persistent, and it disproportionately affects low-income Americans and communities of color. We need to continue to work towards broadband for all, not just so that diverse communities have access to diverse voices, but so that they might become those voices.

Finally, we can't expect the internet to solve all of our problems. Our experiences with misinformation and fake news online are a daily reminder of why access to trusted outlets, like broadcasters, remains essential to our society, particularly when it comes to news and other vital information.

The headline is this: when we turn on the TV or the radio or we go online, we should all be able to see and hear stories that represent us, told by people who look and sound like we do. We still have a long way to go to ensure that diverse voices thrive at every level of media.

We will need to make our own voices heard and do the hard work of ensuring access and opportunity for everyone. But I remain as confident today as the day I was sworn in that we are up to the task. I am looking forward to the conversation.

Thank you.