

**STATEMENT OF  
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

*Re: Standardized and Enhanced Disclosure Requirements for Television Broadcast Licensee Public Interest Obligations & Extension of the Filing Requirement For Children's Television Programming Report (FCC Form 398) (MB Docket Nos. 00-168 and 00-44)*

This is a good step forward. While it doesn't deliver the real kind of public interest standards that I think the American people would like to have for those who manage the public's airwaves, it will provide significantly more information to inform us all about what and how broadcasters are doing. So if we ever get serious about having an honest-to-goodness licensing and re-licensing regime around here—and I intend to push hard for that—we will have much better data on which to make those decisions.

For decades, representatives of the public interest community have recognized the importance of requiring enhanced disclosure by broadcasters. Thanks in large part to the pioneering scholarship and advocacy of these tireless individuals, it has been widely accepted for some time that broadcasters have an obligation to give the American people a better picture of how their airwaves are being used. Indeed, by the late 1990s—when President Clinton and Vice President Gore convened the Advisory Committee on Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters—the one mandatory requirement that both industry and public interest representatives could agree upon was enhanced disclosure requirements for broadcasters.

So while today's item is long overdue, it is also enormously welcome. Requiring stations all across the country to post standardized information about programming aired in response to issues facing local communities will be an enormous service to us all. It means that every American citizen will have the tools necessary to see whether or not local broadcasters are living up to their end of the bargain to serve the public interest in return for free use of the people's property.

I fear many of us may be quite troubled by what we learn. To take one example, researchers at the University of Southern California documented several years ago that, in the 30 days before the last Presidential election, only around 8 percent of local newscasts contained any local electoral coverage, including coverage of races for the U.S. House of Representatives. This is a shocking conclusion, with enormous relevance for contemporary policy debates. In order to reach this important conclusion, researchers had to watch over 2,000 hours of newscasts from markets all across the country. Needless to say, few scholars have the resources to conduct this type of study. Today's item, however, will allow researchers to conduct similar analyses in a tiny fraction of the time.

Even more important than the impact on program analysis, today's decision will also empower concerned and politically active citizens to become involved in the fight for a better and more democratic media environment. Every American citizen will be able to look up, on the Internet, the programs aired by his or her local station in the discharge of its public interest obligations. Every citizen will be able to form an independent opinion about whether that station is doing enough to justify the continued use of the public airwaves. And if citizens come to believe that a station is not holding up its end of the bargain, they can petition the FCC not to renew that station's license. Here we come full circle, of course, because that gets us right back to the need to put in place a credible system that makes re-licensing contingent on a station's actual performance in serving the public interest. Our mantra should be: no public interest performance, no license.

So what we do here today will be vindicated by what we do about public interest obligations more expansively. For today, I commend the Chairman for bringing us this important and potentially very progressive item, and I thank my colleagues for working with me to implement a variety of additional provisions that make it even stronger. Many thanks also to the Bureau for its hard work.