

**Remarks by FCC OCBO Director Thomas A. Reed
International Black Broadcasters Association
12th Annual Awards Dinner
St. Regis Hotel, Washington, DC
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Good evening. It is an honor to be here tonight to celebrate IBBA's 12th anniversary. My thanks to IBBA President, Rob Neal, for inviting me to speak with you this evening. Rob has been fighting the good fight with grace and urgency these past twelve years. The broadcast industry is better off as a result of his tireless efforts. I'd also like to take this opportunity to congratulate IBBA for twelve years of outstanding work in promoting the growth of minority broadcasting. And last, I congratulate tonight's honorees on their extraordinary achievements in broadcast and film.

IBBA promotes ownership, employment, education, and equality for minority broadcasters. It uses its powerful megaphone to empower the community. It is a mission the FCC shares. It is our job at the FCC to create policy that promotes a diversity of voices over the airwaves – to create policy that opens up opportunities for all Americans to participate in and benefit from a robust communications environment. This work, with the support of organizations like IBBA, is needed now more than ever.

Minority broadcasters are being pounded on all fronts: a sluggish economy, a plummeting advertising market, a rapidly evolving technological landscape – all play havoc with previously tried and true business models. A particular issue for minority owners is the added challenge of capital – made even more difficult by a capital market that's in the basement. The result: while minorities comprise 34 percent of the U.S. population, they own just 3 percent of full-power TV stations and less than 8 percent of full power radio. This has been a long-standing concern for the Commission.

Why do we continue to wrestle with this issue? Well, understanding the importance of diversity is not just sound policy; it is essential to a dynamic market place of ideas. Broadcasters, indeed, all players in the communications eco-system realize that in order to reach and hold an audience, you must first understand what is most important to them, what resonates. Successful broadcasters give their audiences content that they can identify with, that they can see themselves in. You give them a reflection of themselves. This is exceedingly difficult to do if you don't see what your audience sees; if you haven't lived where they live.

So the communications industry, with the free market system as a driver, is sorting out this dynamic. It is becoming more inclusive because it has to be.

With the help of organizations like IBBA, the communications industry is starting to understand that it is much better served by having diversity at the top – where content is created – so that it can provide more truly diverse content to its audience.

The beauty of communications policy in the context of civil rights is that we don't have to argue diversity for its own sake. The needs of diverse communities must be part of the framework or it doesn't work at all. As the Supreme Court ruled long ago, "the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public."

So, what are we doing at the FCC to advance the interests of diversity? In addition to making rules, the FCC is dedicated to assisting new Communications owners through a number of programs. My office, the FCC's Office of Communications Business Opportunities ("OCBO"), is connecting entrepreneurs with financial experts who make daily decisions about capital infusion. We will be hosting our third annual capital access conference this coming December 8th. We're connecting small businesses to larger communications companies to facilitate the kind of supplier opportunities that are essential to the growth of small business. In early 2012, we will convene a conference of supplier diversity executives from the top media and communications companies to discuss best practices in the private procurement arena. We also continue to examine broadband and new media strategies for minority broadcasters – strategies that will enable broadcasters to revitalize their business models and create additional income streams.

The FCC is constantly seeking commentary and ideas on diversity initiatives. The reconstituted Federal Advisory Committee on Diversity in the Digital Age will look closely at the current state of media diversity as it identifies diversity priorities. The Committee's next open meeting is scheduled for December 6th at FCC headquarters. If you use a computer or cell phone, watch a TV, listen to a radio, or read a newspaper, you need to be part of this critical discussion.

As the FCC moves forward on its diversity agenda, we will depend on your input. How should we define diversity? What are the issues that are unique to different cultures, races, ethnicities? Should we look at the issue from the standpoint of content creators? Distributors? Consumers? How strong is the nexus between media ownership and the kind of content that is important to minorities and women? These are important questions. We'll need your expertise to resolve them. As OCBO's Director, I will continue to push for greater equality - through enhanced diversity in media, both in front of and behind the cameras and the microphones.

Once again, I am honored to celebrate with you tonight and I look forward to seeing you in the morning as we all redouble our efforts.

Thank you very much.