

Thank you, Chairman Genachowski, Commissioner Copps, and thank you, Steven.

I'm Laura Walker President and CEO of the nation's largest public radio station group. We reach 11 million people across our many platforms each month I am very pleased to join you here today. The "Information Needs of Communities" is a critical statement about the role of local news and public media in creating civic discourse and providing trustworthy reporting on the issues that impact our communities. This morning, I'd like to build on a few key points from this report and to suggest how and why public media needs a new kind of support in order to serve those communities and to thrive in the new media world.

Just over a month ago, Hurricane Irene was roaring up the East Coast and New York was bracing for potential disaster. After a particularly brutal winter last year, the city was taking all precautions and laid out an evacuation plan that identified just what neighborhoods were at risk, and where their inhabitants could seek shelter. Who would have to leave their homes? Where do 8 million people go? Needless to say, against these concerns and fears was a pressing need to get this information to the public in a clear, considered and immediate way. Our newsroom put together an interactive map of New York City illustrating all of the evacuation zones. You could just plug in your address and see if you would need to evacuate. When the storm arrived, the city government website lost power and wnyc.org was one of the only places citizens could get this vital information. At any given moment, 45,000 people were viewing the map. More than 1 million unique users in a month. We served a critical role in keeping them informed and safe.

There are more than 1,600 public radio journalists across the country performing the same service for their listeners – covering stories no one else is covering, holding governments accountable, exposing critical community issues, and making an impact.

Look at the California Report out of KQED in San Francisco: did a piece covering the history of the bills that have recently gone through the legislature and how this impacted the combative end to the 2011 legislative session (<http://blogs.kqed.org/capitalnotes/2011/09/12/reporters-notebook-bill-o-rama/>).

WFPL in Louisville has been doing multiple series on Coal Ash and its devastating health and environmental impact on the community. (<http://www.wfpl.org/2011/07/22/the-coal-ash-series-in-full/>). AN in TV our own neighbor WNET is producing a nightly newscast in New Jersey.

And with digital technology, there is now an extraordinary opportunity to join and drive the so-called “open data” movement – to take the vast amounts of data from local governments and interpret them in a way that helps local citizens. The first step, as the FCC report states, is that government has to make the data available. But the real work is in making those data understandable and relevant.

(might cut-- For example, the New York City and State governments release a trove of Department of Education data on their websites. But the information comes in massive, unparsed databases that are barely intelligible. How is this useful to someone who wants to know about the bilingual offerings of a school they are applying to? Or what the attendance record is? That’s why WNYC partnered with the New York Times on a project called SchoolBook.

Schoolbook.org takes data from the DOE and makes it accessible, adds expert journalism and commentary, and also engages the online community for their input.)

Now, the ability of public media to engage their local listeners and provide these services did not just happen by itself. Nor did it happen just recently. It happened because of the commitment and the clarity of vision of the federal government and the FCC.

The special place that public media occupies in our society actually dates back to 1934 and the passage of the Communications Act. It was then, in the early days of radio, that Congress and the FCC had the foresight to set about providing nonprofit broadcasters with a dedicated presence on the radio spectrum. Their act was an explicit endorsement of the vital, distinctive service that public stations provide listeners. And it was a recognition that, left to fend for themselves in the marketplace, public stations would be financially and technically vulnerable to the power of for-profit stations.

The result of the FCC's wisdom was what we now call public radio, and public radio has more than justified America's faith in its mission and support for its survival.

Today, like all legacy media, public radio is embracing the opportunities of the digital era. In order to meet the ambitious goal set out in the report—TO MEET THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF OUR COMMUNITIES--Stations like ours are working hard to adapt to changing technologies, audience behaviors and economics... reinventing ourselves as multi-platform content providersputting new programming on the web and

on mobile networks.... And making it available to new audiences wherever they are, whenever they need it, on the devices of their choice.

But with these wonderful opportunities come new and complex challenges to the health of public media and the viability of its programs and services. As Internet providers focus primarily on profits, public media runs the risk of being consigned to second-tier status. The audience's historic right to a dedicated, secure, unrestricted, free access to public media is threatened.

In 1934, the issue was capacity on the public airwaves; in 2011, the issue is capacity on the Internet. Regardless of the outcome of policy issues around network openness and access, the public deserves access to the unique content provided by public media over new communications platforms just as it did over the old platforms. Commercial interests will debate neutrality issues, which companies should pay for transport and how they should pay. But as non-profits, public media must have the opportunity to make their content available in a way that is not subject to these debates.

Public media is essential to local news and to supporting an informed democracy. It needs both financial and regulatory support to build out its newsrooms to reach farther and deeper into our cities, to hold government and other leaders accountable, to enrich the local conversations across our national landscape.

As the FCC wrestles with the tangled policy issues of the digital era, as it addresses the information needs of local communities, I'd like to suggest we recall the

principles that have protected and supported public media from the earliest days of the communications revolution to define the equivalent of spectrum set aside in the digital world.. Those principles are at least as relevant today as they were then.

Thank you.