

OPENING STATEMENTS

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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

Thank you, Chairman Powell, Commissioners Abernathy, Coops and Adelstein and distinguished panelists, for the opportunity to participate in the FCC's Localism Taskforce Hearings in San Antonio, Texas.

Speaking to and defining Localism in the broad and complex spectrum of broadcast programming is difficult at best and so today I will share some comments and suggestions which hopefully will lead to some positive changes in the industry.

Since the FCC Commission has previously found that non-entertainment programming guidelines and formalized ascertainment procedures were unduly burdensome and unnecessary for both television and radio stations, today I would like to suggest some Regulation changes and incentives in the areas of licensing requirements and incentives to promote greater attention to Localism.

Incentives to improve Localism

The FCC's decision last summer to deregulate media ownership rules of radio, newspaper and television stations in the same market as well as the raising of the national broadcasting rule from 35% to 45%, will not serve the minority communities as they continue to be underserved by the growing trend of corporate centralization of broadcasting formats and homogenized media coverage of local news.

We continue to see a lack of coverage on voter registration drives, health issues and cultural initiatives due to a trend towards corporate centralization of news or information, which is considered more mainstream.

Revisiting the 35% threshold would provide the incentive needed here.

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Regulations that would improve Localism

Licensing requirement should go back to three years, from the current eight years.

The American people would not tolerate a health system that only allows for an eight -year cycle of physical check ups, for obvious reasons.

The American people would not tolerate an educational system that measures educational achievement and learning progress of our children every eight years or a system that only allows an evaluation of the emissions systems of our vehicles under the auspices of burdensome and unnecessary guidelines because of the obvious path towards the accelerated demise of our communities. Thus our present system of checks and balances serves us well.

There are numerous other parallels we could illustrate; but in an effort to avoid redundancy, we hope a viable point has been made here today.

This evening, plain ordinary citizens find themselves on the precipice of relinquishing their right to one of our most precious and valuable resources, and that is the right to unencumbered, unfiltered and relevant local news, information and cultural awareness initiatives which are taking place in our community via the nation's airways.

There are presently numerous red flags on the broadcast media horizon. But among the most visible is the glaring lack of minorities in the executive ranks as well as Governing Board Members of these corporations. And, We Must Not Accept the rationalized criteria used to justify these numbers; which only serve to divert attention away from one of the main responsibilities imbedded in the broadcast license renewals of these entities and, that is TO PROVIDE A COMMUNITY SERVICE.

As ordinary citizens, we must stand ready to evaluate and assist broadcast media entities from succumbing to the pitfalls of corporate inbreeding, which results when viable diversity is not present, as well as the practice of re-cycling minority Board of Directors members, an abuse which was recently highlighted in the example of one person who serves on 12 to 14 boards of Fortune 50 companies and who publicly stated that he spends most of his time traveling from meeting to meeting, which begs the question: “How can such a person honestly look after the interests of the consumers and shareholders of these entities”?

We must pay strict attention to the direct correlation between the lack of diverse input and viable governance and the demise of recent giants in Energy, Securities, Health Care....to name a few, and the adverse domino effect on ordinary citizens.

To this end, we will be working with members of Congress on legislation to curtail the abuse of Board of Directors Recycling in publicly traded and regulated industries.

By far, the most direct impact on the everyday lives of ordinary citizens, is the News Information and right of our voices and viewpoints to be heard via our airwaves, and as such, we must ensure that the broadcast media is held to the highest standards, via improved renewal and licensing evaluations.

The public trust that has been given to them for safe guarding, IS NOT an entitlement program, and must be earned everyday by viable engagement of ideas, management and governance within their corporate structures, or that trust will be lost in the near future.

If we step back and look through the eyes of the minority community, Localism in the broadcast industry is ailing and the present environment will not cure it.