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Thank you, Patrick, for that kind introduction.

Good afternoon.

Six years ago today, 19 terrorists forever changed our nation's sense of security, causing great fear and the loss of innocence among all Americans.

As broadcasters, the tragic events of 9/11 strengthened our resolve to serve the American public – to be among the first responders in times of crisis.

On September 11, 2001, people in this country and around the world sat transfixed by the news they saw and heard on every radio and TV news broadcast. What most people learned about the tragic events of that day was provided by America's broadcasters.

Even those watching cable news were seeing video provided by local affiliate feeds.

As we saw on 9/11, broadcasters and journalists race to cover the dangerous situations that most people would run away from. With their cameras, notebooks and microphones in hand, radio, TV and print journalists put their lives in jeopardy to capture the events for the rest of the nation to witness.

We commend both electronic and print journalists who are committed to being the eyes, ears and voices of the American people, but today I would like to focus on the role of broadcasters.

As the senior advisor to Belo Corp., I am proud of the organization's deep commitment to serving the public. During Hurricane Katrina, only one television station, Belo's WWL-TV in New Orleans, remained on the air uninterrupted, providing the vital – often lifesaving – information that the public, government and relief agencies relied on to coordinate aid to the victims.

Ninety-three WWL employees devoted their entire time to providing non-stop coverage of Katrina and the levee breaches, not knowing themselves what had happened to their own homes and personal goods.

Many of those employees actually experienced major damage to their homes or lost all of their possessions, yet they continued to work around the clock. At various times, a station had to operate from four different studio locations due to flooding and evacuations – two in New Orleans and two in Baton Rouge. For 11 days, the station provided non-stop coverage beginning two days before Katrina and running commercial-free for over 250 hours.

While this is a dramatic example of how broadcasters serve the public, you find the same dedication among broadcasters in every market in the U.S.

Disasters like these remind us of the essential role that broadcasters play in our communities. The more than 15,000 local radio and television stations in the United States serve their local communities every day, providing them with local news and other critical community information – such as emergency and severe weather warnings and Amber alerts.

There are congressional members who recognize the important function of local broadcasters in responding to major disasters.

In April, Senator Mary Landrieu of Louisiana, along with Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska, introduced The First Response Broadcasters Act of 2007.

On the House side, the bill was introduced by Representatives Charlie Melancon of Louisiana, Chip Pickering of Mississippi and Dan Boren of Oklahoma. Senator Landrieu developed this legislation after witnessing the struggles of local broadcasters to remain on the air during Hurricane Katrina. The bill would ensure that local radio and television stations are able to broadcast essential public information to disaster areas uninterrupted.

If government is to improve disaster preparedness in our nation, then it must also ensure that broadcasters have the tools to communicate with people during these times of crisis.

Since the advent of radio and television, local broadcasters have made it their mission to better inform the citizens they serve.

In addition to the news and other important community information, broadcasters have aggressively provided access to our political leaders in many different ways.

As an example, Belo began a program in 1996 called "It's Your Time," which provides free air time to political candidates running for governor or federal office.

In the 2006 election season, Belo stations and Web sites provided more than 13 hours of free air time to 146 congressional and gubernatorial candidates. It maximized voter education by combining this with free debates and news coverage, totaling 150 hours of political coverage on our 15 news-producing television stations. In addition, Belo also used its local and regional cable news channels and streamed stories and other related data on its Web sites for even greater reach.

Again, this is just one example as I know many other companies provide other programs and means of free air time.

As the greatest democracy in the world, it is important that we continue to allow broadcasters to accurately report the news as they see it and to provide the American public with the information they seek to become educated citizens. That is why it is crucial that we fight to preserve the First Amendment right to free speech.

The struggle to protect the freedom of speech is a battle that you, our friends at The Media Institute, are most familiar with. Since its founding in 1979, The Media Institute has been committed to defending our right to speak freely, and for that, we are very grateful.

I want to personally thank Patrick Maines for advising NAB on First Amendment issues. He has been a valuable source of information and a strong ally in our fight to stave off attempts to restrict free speech.

In recent years, we have, indeed, had to fight against those who want to limit our First Amendment rights.

Issues like the Fairness Doctrine and the changing definitions of indecency and violence are keeping broadcasters alert over potential threats to the First Amendment.

One assault on the First Amendment is coming from individuals who want to revive the old FCC policy that was known as the “Fairness Doctrine.” Contrary to what the name of the policy may suggest, we believe that the doctrine is unfair, unnecessary and unconstitutional.

The FCC abolished the doctrine in 1987, determining that it actually restricted the journalistic freedom of broadcasters and lessened the flow of diverse viewpoints to the public.

In addition, the doctrine has been found to be outdated and unnecessary due to the explosive growth of media outlets and technological developments in the marketplace.

But that hasn't stopped certain congressional members from attempting to bring back the doctrine. But common sense has prevailed and recent attempts to revive the doctrine have been defeated.

Today, broadcast viewers and listeners enjoy a rich diversity of viewpoints from all sides of the political spectrum.

Instead of dictating government policies that stifle free speech, shouldn't we trust the American people to change the channel if they don't agree with what's being said?

As broadcasters, it is our duty to deliver the information to our audiences, but it should be left to them to decide how to process it.

While broadcasters are leading the charge to defend the principles of the First Amendment right to free speech, we are also dealing with other tough challenges in Washington and beyond that have an impact on broadcasting.

It doesn't make it any easier that we are currently facing regulatory hurdles that threaten the way we conduct our business, and face even more looming interference from the government in the future.

In regards to television content, regulators and policy makers are weighing in on several different broadcasting issues from what foods children see advertised on their favorite television shows to what words should be considered "indecent" and what images are deemed "violent."

Broadcasters are also facing many challenges on the distribution side, such as:

- Efforts to educate the public about the digital television transition in 2009;

- Fighting a tax that the record labels want to impose on radio stations for playing recordings they promote for free;
- And beating back attempts by the big technology companies to allow the use of television broadcast signals – what we call interference zones, and the other side calls “white spaces” – for portable, unlicensed devices.

But today, I want to focus on two specific challenges: the digital television transition and the performance tax.

First, the digital television – or DTV – transition. This is an issue that NAB and the industry are taking very seriously. After Congress made February 17, 2009, the hard date for analog shutoff in early 2006, NAB immediately went on the offensive and made it its single highest priority.

We want to get the message out that DTV offers many exciting benefits to consumers – clearer pictures and better sound quality. And stations will be able to broadcast one channel or multiple channels simultaneously using the same or less capacity, giving them the ability to offer more diverse television content to consumers.

But before we get there, we must first educate the public about what is happening in February 2009. Let me give you the current landscape of the household demographics to give you an idea of what is involved in this undertaking.

There are at least 19.6 million households nationwide that rely exclusively on free, over-the-air broadcasting. Another 14.7 million households may have some television sets connected to paid services such as cable or satellite, but also have additional unconnected sets in bedrooms or kitchens that could lose reception after the transition.

And we know that the people who will be most disproportionately affected by the DTV transition are older Americans, minority populations, the economically disadvantaged and those living in rural areas.

It's important that we ensure that none of these people lose access to their local television programming.

But we have a lot of work to do. The majority of Americans still don't know what DTV truly means. In fact, more than 60 percent of Americans surveyed are completely unaware that the transition is taking place. That's why the NAB has an entire team devoted exclusively to educating consumers on the digital transition.

If this effort were a political campaign, then DTV is the candidate, February 17, 2009 is Election Day and over-the-air television viewers are the targeted voters. We will have won this campaign if no consumer loses access to free local television programming after that date due to a lack of information about the transition.

An important element of this campaign is building coalitions to reach out to as many people as we effectively can.

To that end, the NAB has established the DTV Transition Coalition, which is currently made up of more than 160 businesses, trade associations and membership organizations. And we are pleased that the FCC officially joined in July.

In addition to an aggressive media relations strategy, NAB has also engaged in paid media and marketing that targets public transportation hubs and newspapers. NAB has also launched a Web site – DTVAnswers.com – to educate consumers on the easy steps to prepare for February 2009.

And NAB is taking this education campaign on the road, attending more than 20 regional and national conferences this year and spearheading a national DTV Speakers Bureau, which is planning 8,000 speaking engagements through 2009.

And later this fall, NAB will launch a national DTV road show – a traveling media event that will reach more than 200 cities before February 2009.

NAB is keeping focused on making this transition as consumer-friendly as possible.

We agree with the FCC's position that broadcasters' must-carry signals ought to be viewable by all cable subscribers and that the material degradation of broadcast programming in the digital environment should be prevented. I take offense at the inconsistent comments of the cable industry – on one hand, they tell consumers cable will take care of the transition for them. On the other hand, they tell the FCC they lack the capacity to carry all broadcast channels. Our first responsibility should be to the consumer and ensuring that they enjoy the full benefits offered by digital technology.

This is a momentous time for the broadcasting business. The future of our industry hangs in the balance – a smooth transition to digital television has a great impact on the direction we take past February 17, 2009.

Unquestionably, our nation depends on over-the-air television to keep our communities informed and entertained. It is crucial that we ensure no one loses this invaluable link to this vital communications medium.

On the radio side, we find ourselves up against the big record labels that want to line their pockets with a “performance tax” on local radio broadcasters.

There is a symbiotic relationship between the recording industry and radio stations – free play for free promotion – that has worked for over 80 years.

But now, the recording industry is facing many challenges keeping up in this ever-changing digital world. With the explosion of digital sources of music such as iTunes and the rise of Internet piracy, the recording industry found itself suffering from declining revenues in 2006 for the seventh consecutive year.

Clearly, the recording industry has not changed its business model to react to these changes in the marketplace.

Yes, the record labels are undergoing a transitional period, but there is no justification to levy a tax on local broadcasters who promote their music and concerts for free. Essentially, this amounts to biting the hand that feeds them.

On Capitol Hill, the recording industry has been mounting an aggressive campaign to make this performance tax a reality. They have found allies in several members who want to develop legislation that would impose a performance tax on local radio broadcasters.

Despite these attempts, we are confident that the majority of American people are on our side.

A performance tax would ruin the mutually beneficial relationship between the two industries and have a serious financial impact on local radio broadcasters.

All broadcasters would have to forfeit a percentage of their revenues every year to the major record labels – of which three out of four are located on foreign shores.

A performance tax would severely limit the ability of stations to serve their local markets and deliver news and public service messages to their community. Also, local radio stations have always provided new and emerging artists with much needed exposure, but they're the ones the record labels will end up hurting with a performance tax.

It has been an amazing 40 years working in this business, and I have enjoyed every minute of it. I am proud to be associated with a business that takes seriously its role in serving the public, acting as first responders in times of crisis. Broadcasting is the cultural glue that connects our entire nation. Let me repeat that: Broadcasting is the cultural glue that connects our entire nation. Therefore, I believe that it's worth fighting the good fight to protect the invaluable role that local television and radio play in our lives.

Undeniably, these are times of constant change. While we find ourselves embracing and taking advantage of new technologies in this digital age, we also find ourselves operating in a very competitive marketplace.

But throughout all of this, our commitment to protecting the rights of broadcasters provided by the First Amendment and our dedication to serving our local communities remains the same. And the NAB, The Media Institute and local radio and TV stations stand shoulder to shoulder, ready to defend any threat to the freedom of speech.

Yes, there are some daunting challenges ahead of us, but we are focused on the future, and right now, the future looks very bright. With challenges also come enormous opportunities, and that's why I am excited about being in this business.

I very much appreciate the opportunity to share some thoughts with you today, and I would be glad to take some of your questions.