

Remarks by Decker Anstrom Presenting The Media Institute's 2010 Freedom of Speech Award To Kyle E. McSarrow October 6, 2010

Thanks, Dick, for that kind introduction – and for your longtime leadership at The Media Institute. It is ALWAYS an honor to share a platform with you. Thanks also, Commissioner Baker, for joining us tonight – and for your thoughtful remarks. And congratulations to Patrick, and The Media Institute staff, for another terrific awards evening – and for your unwavering support for free speech and the First Amendment.

Just six years ago, if I had stood here and told you that Kyle McSarrow would be honored tonight for his commitment to free speech principles, I probably would have been met with blank stares. Kyle then was wrapping up a distinguished run as Deputy Secretary of Energy. Yet, as prominent as he was in official Washington, it's a safe bet that the majority of you did not know him. Which makes it all the more impressive that tonight this telecommunications crowd honors Kyle.

Now I can't claim credit for Kyle's passionate commitment to free speech principles. But success breeds many parents – and I WILL take some credit for Kyle's being at NCTA. In 2004, I had the opportunity to co-chair, with Bob Miron, the NCTA search committee that found and hired Kyle as NCTA President and CEO.

It's fair to say we fell in love with Kyle right away. His experience on Capitol Hill ... in politics ... and with an Internet start-up.... And his obvious smarts ... integrity... humility... and political sophistication were – and REMAIN – a winning combination. Although I will add: Some of us knew that the REAL political talent in the family was – and still is – ALISON McSarrow. And Alison, we are delighted you are here this evening as well.

To say that Kyle was a quick study in telecommunications policy would be an understatement. From his very first day on the job in early 2005, when several leading senators unexpectedly launched an inquiry into television content, Kyle immediately became an expert on cable issues.

In this first test, Kyle stressed the First Amendment rights of media, including cable operators and cable networks. And he demonstrated that cable's parental controls preserved First Amendment rights, while giving parents the ability to control what their children watched.

In that first test, he also displayed the skill to UNITE the NCTA Board around First Amendment and deregulatory principles – and to RESIST pressure from some in Congress and at the FCC to accept sweeping new regulation of cable programming and marketing. That skill – to unite competitive CEOs – is a unique, critical one. To paraphrase Jack Valenti, keeping CEOs on the same page is like trying to herd frogs into a wheelbarrow!

Since that early, successful trial-by-fire, Kyle has been a firm and clear voice for the First Amendment. Nowhere has this been more important than in his unvarnished description of how so-called network neutrality proposals would restrict the First Amendment rights of ISPs and network providers.

More broadly, Kyle and NCTA have also been early and strong supporters of The Media Institute-sponsored National Freedom of Speech Week. And he recently authored a thoughtful seven-part series on the role of the First Amendment in the growth and success of the cable television industry.

The Bottom Line: Kyle McSlarrow in just a few short years has emerged as an extraordinary leader who has proven bi-partisanship is NOT dead, and become the telecommunication industry's LEADING voice – a voice for First Amendment-based, pro-competitive, deregulatory policies that will promote GROWTH, JOBS, and CHOICE.

We are lucky he said YES to the NCTA Board six years ago.

Please join me in welcoming and congratulating the recipient of The Media Institute's Freedom of Speech Award ... my friend ... and the President and CEO of the National Cable & Telecommunications Association, Kyle McSlarrow.