

**Remarks by Senator Roger F. Wicker
Presenting The Media Institute's
2012 Freedom of Speech Award
To Bob Pittman
November 14, 2012**

It is a special privilege for me to be here tonight with representatives from all sectors of the media to present the Freedom of Speech award to Robert W. Pittman. Most of you are well aware of Bob's impressive climb to become one of the premier media moguls in America, and by now you also know that Bob is a native of Mississippi – a fact which is a source of pride to us in the Magnolia State. Mississippi is a small state – a small town, actually – and it happens that I have known Bob since he was a teenager growing up in Brookhaven.

You see, Bob is the younger brother of Tom Pittman, an accomplished Journalist in his own right and one of my closest companions when Tom and I were students at Ole Miss.

It may, or may not, have occurred to Bob that I would contact my old friend, his brother, to recall a few things for this brief introduction tonight. But why not go all the way back to his childhood days in Mississippi? After all, this audience already knows the dizzying twists and turns of Bob's illustrious professional career – from his early days in radio at Pittsburgh, Chicago, and finally WNBC New York, to MTV, then Six Flags, Quantum Media, Century 21, America Online, Time Warner, and now Clear Channel.

If it seems that Bob has had trouble holding a job, it was the same way during his childhood. The family recalls that Bob had a new hobby every six months, and then – as in later years – he would just move on – from violin to fly fishing, from rock and roll to photography to reading the Worldbook Encyclopedia all the way through from cover to cover.

But it was aviation that finally caught Bob Pittman's imagination, and that hobby has lasted for four decades. He now has over 5,000 flight hours; holds an Airline Transport Pilot's license; and is rated for helicopters and three types of jets.

And it was his passion for flying that led to his career in the media. At age 15, Bob's father refused to pay for flying lessons, forcing Bob to fund the new hobby on his own. He first applied for a job at the local Piggly Wiggly grocery store, but Piggly Wiggly was not hiring.

Undeterred, Bob kept looking, and his second stop on the job hunt was the local country music radio station, which gave Bob a chance and a start – and became the launching pad for his career. One might wonder how different Bob's life – and the media landscape – would be today had Piggly Wiggly said yes. As it turned out, the "boy wonder" who stopped by a country music radio station, hoping to get a job to pay for his flying lessons, would become a trailblazer – according to *Advertising Age*, one of the 10 most influential marketers of American culture.

It is a rare gift to read audiences, and some might say Bob's upbringing as the son of a Methodist preacher helped him develop a knack for knowing what the public wants. Moving from place to

place frequently as a preacher's kid, he was forced to adapt and to observe. The new kid in town learned to read people, to size them up quickly, and this perspective has no doubt helped him in keeping the customers satisfied for some of America's most recognizable brands.

Tonight's award is a well-deserved recognition of Bob's contributions to free speech and democracy. I congratulate this pioneer, my friend of 43 years, and son of Mississippi on his many successes and thank him for his work to advance and protect free speech. Ladies and gentlemen, the Freedom of Speech Award goes to Bob Pittman.