Thank you for that kind introduction. The spot you just saw is a good reminder of broadcasters’ vital role in American society.

A quote from one of our founding fathers, James Madison, also comes to mind when thinking of local radio and television stations’ importance in our daily lives. He said: “A popular government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy; or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.”

Madison knew then as we know now that knowledge is power and that the media, when functioning properly, helps spread that power among the people. “Popular information,” as Madison described it, is one of the foundations of our Democratic ideals. It is the most absolute and necessary ingredient to vigorous public discourse. And this room knows better than any other that Americans cannot “be their own governors” without it. That’s why today – nearly 250 years since Madison spoke those words – the right to speak freely without fear of incrimination, the right of the press to challenge the government and root out corruption, remains one of the most important rights our founders enshrined in the Constitution.

Broadcasters have been, and continue to be, proud stewards of these ideals in the modern media age. It is a mission we hold dear to our hearts, and one that we are proud to share with our friends at the Media Institute.

I don’t know if you heard, but we had an election last week. As the events around the country over the past seven days suggest, many are still adjusting to a dramatically changed landscape here in Washington, D.C. As we digest the election results and the will of the people, Madison’s words ring true now more than ever. Broadcasters recognize their core duty to provide the public with the “popular information” required to help American citizens be their own governors.

There has been a great deal of focus on the media’s role during and following the election. For broadcasters in particular, self-evaluation is nothing new; as part of their mission, broadcasters constantly reflect upon how they do their jobs and seek ways to better serve the public. This includes questions about the amount and type of information explored to fact-checking and evaluating what issues really matter to the American people. This is happening now, as it happens after every election.

In reflecting on our role in American discourse, it is also critical to look at the ways various elements of the “media” serve our electorate. First, it is critical to recognize that today’s media is not monolithic. It is far more complex. Print newspapers are struggling mightily to survive in an online world. And social media is perceived by many as a “Wild West” of misinformation, even the source of fake news, where sorting fact from fiction has become increasingly more challenging.

It’s not that Americans don’t have enough access to information today. In fact, many of us may suffer from information overload; it can be overwhelming. In this digital world, it is very easy for the average American to find information that confirms their beliefs rather than challenges them. This is where local broadcasters play such an important role in our democracy. They present the public with facts, provide information about issues that matter to people where they live. And, perhaps more importantly, local broadcasters are always the go-to lifeline in times of crisis.
I am reminded of what my former Senate colleague, Chuck Schumer from New York, once said about broadcasters. He said that in a time when cable news media is becoming incredibly polarized and partisan, local news has become even more valuable to our democratic dialogue.

When Americans want “just the facts,” they know they can turn to their local stations to get the news straight, without the shouting, finger-pointing and drama. When they want to find out what’s going on in their community – like what’s happening in their schools, if their favorite sports team is winning or what the weather will be – they tune into their local stations.

A recent Pew Research/Knight Foundation survey confirms this view. It revealed that among those who are civically engaged – the people who are actively involved in their communities, the ones who vote and volunteer – a great majority said they turn more often to local TV and radio to get the news they trust, far more than social media. In fact, by a 7-1 margin, local broadcasting was viewed as a more trusted news source than social media.

Even Facebook chief executive and co-founder, Mark Zuckerberg, said recently that Facebook’s role isn’t to be “arbiters of truth.”

Our communities’ deep reliance on local broadcasters compels us to keep innovating.

Access to your local stations is always available for free with an antenna and no one but local broadcasters provide this ubiquitous public service. Broadcasters are also striving to make our signals available on every device at every location – including wearables, connected watches and other technologies that are on the horizon. Everyone wants what broadcasters have – our content and our spectrum – but nobody wants to do what we do – provide local news and information, live and free to all Americans.

This is an exciting time for broadcasting as new technologies are giving us the ability improve the delivery of our content to our listeners and viewers.

As a new Congress and administration begin in 2017, we look forward to educating new and returning legislators about the important role of local radio and television stations in the American lifestyle, and the issues that impact broadcasters’ ability to innovate and serve the public.

Our issues do not register Republican or Democrat, but rather, reflect the needs of the communities we serve.

And our communities expect us to be everywhere they are – on every device and every platform.

But that means broadcasters need to be competitive with other services in the media and telecommunications ecosystem. We need the freedom to develop new products and services, and the ability to move quickly, unhindered by unnecessary regulations.

We are excited about the development of Next Generation Television, also known as ATSC 3.0.

This is the world’s first broadcast standard that offers the advantages of broadcast and broadband. Next Gen TV promises to deliver those sharp ultra HD images that everyone loves, plus interactive features, customizable content and multichannel immersive sound.

Viewers can look forward to more choices, more channels and more flexibility – all for free. Mobile devices and TV sets equipped with Next Gen receivers will make TV available virtually anywhere.
The only thing that stands between viewers and this new enhanced free service is government action. Unlike other competitive services, local stations can only begin to innovate after receiving Federal Communications Commission approval.

This past spring, NAB, along with consumer electronics, public safety and public television advocates, asked the FCC to bless a Next Gen TV standard for those who voluntarily choose to adopt it.

Recently, the FCC voted to make expansive amounts of high band spectrum available for wireless services, including 5G service. This follows action after action where the agency has done whatever it can to help other industries lead the world in their respective services.

While we commend the Commission for moving quickly to lay the groundwork for the next generation of wireless service, we urge the FCC to move just as quickly to unleash the next generation of free broadcast television service to the benefit of viewers.

Likewise, NAB is also working to ensure that radio is available on every device – as radio’s audience continues to evolve, we must continue to evolve with them.

Broadcasters have worked tirelessly to craft free-market deals with major phone carriers to promote access to radio receivers in many of their Android smartphones.

We commend these carriers who have unlocked FM radio, recognizing its value to their customers and our listeners, especially in times of emergency when cell phone networks are not as reliable. And we urge Apple to do the same.

Local broadcasters are where Americans turn first for breaking news and safety information. The potentially lifesaving information provided by local stations should be made accessible to as many people as possible, as has been recommended by FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate.

More than 265 million people listen to radio each week. Radio is strong and we will leverage this strength to continue offering not just the radio everyone knows, loves and expects, but an interactive experience that listeners desire.

But unfortunately, outdated media ownership regulations dating back to the 1970s could hurt broadcasters’ ability to innovate and fairly compete in today’s media landscape.

The communications ecosystem dramatically changed with the advent of the internet.

Sadly, newspapers are struggling in today’s digital world. Even prestigious, long-established newspapers are facing layoffs and major budget cuts as they attempt to adapt to a competitive media landscape. As a result, broadcasters are more and more left carrying the mantle for substantive reliable news and essential investigative journalism.

And yet, outdated broadcast ownership rules still remain intact – a regulatory holdover from 1975 that prevents common ownership of a printed daily newspaper and even a single broadcast station in the same local market. These rules are longer necessary, and in today’s media landscape are unfair and hurt competition.

These ownership rules apply only to broadcast stations and not to our direct competitors. Isn’t it ironic that the FCC will allow mega-mergers in the pay-TV industry, but continues to hold local stations hostage under decades-old, outdated rules?
The competitive environment for local broadcasting has changed and regulatory reform is desperately needed so that broadcasters can keep innovating to effectively serve their communities.

Also on the horizon is the conclusion of the broadcast spectrum incentive auction.

We eagerly await the final stages of the auction to learn how many broadcasters will have to move their channels to make room for wireless carriers, and what resources will be needed to complete these relocations.

We hope for a successful conclusion of the auction. We believe that policymakers will ensure there is sufficient time and funds available to allow broadcasters to complete their moves. We must ensure that no viewer is left in the dark because a station is forced off the air or left to foot the bill for expenses that Congress did not intend and stations cannot afford.

The coming year will be a pivotal one in so many ways for us as a nation, and for the broadcasting industry.

I believe that in these transitional times, local radio and television stations become even more relevant to and more trusted by our communities.

As broadcasters, we carry the torch of freedom and integrity, and we must use this to question those in power and to find the truth.

I was reminded of this important mission a few years ago when I accepted an invitation to speak to our colleagues in South America.

I was a bit surprised when asked to speak about broadcasters’ role in preserving the freedom of speech. In our country, we take for granted that this is a fundamental human right. But some of our neighbors are not fortunate to have this freedom.

What brought this issue home to me was a tour of old Montevideo, Uruguay. The ancient stone gateway to that city still stands after some 400 years.

It does so because of the keystone at the top of the structure that holds it all in place. Take the keystone out and it all comes tumbling down.

In a similar way, this is the role of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and the freedom of speech and press contained in it.

And keeping the keystone of freedom securely in place – the freedom of speech and of the press – is our highest calling.

It’s a mission I feel grateful and honored to defend as the head of the National Association of Broadcasters.

I truly appreciate this opportunity to share some of my thoughts with you today, and I welcome your questions.

Thank you.