

**The Media Institute
Friends and Benefactors Awards Banquet
Washington, DC
September 27, 2017**

**Dave Lougee, president and CEO, TEGNA
American Horizon Awards Recipient Prepared Remarks**

First, Gordon, I want to thank you for your stewardship of the National Association of Broadcasters during the most dynamic time in our industry. Your steady hand and principled leadership has been extraordinary...and the board of directors are thrilled you have signed on to continue to be our captain for years to come.

And on a personal level, thank you for your guidance and to you and Sharon for your friendship to Danni and me.

I also want to thank the members of the TEGNA management team here tonight, as well as TEGNA board member and former FCC commissioner Susan Ness. Susan, thank you for coming tonight.

And to all the supporters of the Media Institute, thank you for making this very important organization viable. Rick, the work you and Patrick have done is a tremendous service.

If I'd given this speech a year ago...I would be presenting a passionate presentation on the unique and irreplaceable role that TEGNA and other great local broadcasters provide this country and our democracy, and the need for changes in the regulatory environment to allow us to compete. The only difference this year...is now I'm really, really passionate about the same issues, aided by my optimism for long overdue regulatory reform under the leadership of Chairman Pai.

We stand at a critical crossroads in this country. Until recently, public policy seemed to support only national media, while the business model of local journalism came under siege, and newspapers began to disappear.

A few years ago, some policymakers envisioned a utopian view where ubiquitous internet access would lead to a more informed, knowledgeable, and united America...with an internet cavalry coming over the hill to save the day in discerning fact from fiction, and fill the role of local journalism. How's that working for us?

Instead, the opposite has happened. We've become more "tribal," with digital fragmentation allowing us to spend great parts of our days interacting on multiple platforms listening to and interacting with people who are "just like us." So, I get to feel validated, smart, smug in my beliefs. But what I'm really doing is making my world smaller, less informed, and far less knowledgeable, understanding and empathetic for people who don't live like me, nor do I get to hear from them.

Here in DC and in Silicon Valley, there's the start of an overdue debate about whether large social media platforms are media companies, or technology companies. That debate centers around what moral responsibility they do or don't have around fact and fiction, and an informed society.

Local broadcasters have no such identity crisis about our role and responsibility, and we never have.

At TEGNA, every employee can quote you our stated purpose of “serving the greater good of our communities.” We are innovating on all fronts, but our values remain the same.

Last year, before the term fake news entered the national lexicon, we did a pilot on a concept called “Verify,” where we answer viewer requests to help them sift fact from fiction based on information shared on the internet. Today, all of our 46 stations across a third of the country provide this service to our viewers every day.

We have doubled down on our investment in investigative reporting...and over the past few years we have won more national awards for investigative reporting than any local media organization.

And three weeks ago, as the floodwaters of Hurricane Harvey forced us out of our Houston station for the first time in its history, we remained on the air with one lone reporter and photographer...who proceeded on live TV to track down law enforcement and save the life of a trucker who was moments from drowning in the cab of his truck. Our reporter is a white woman who grew up in a small town in Oregon. He’s an African American who lives in Mississippi. Today they were reunited on the Ellen DeGeneres show, viewed by the entire nation.

After Harvey, we sent more than 100 people from other TEGNA stations to help our stations serve the communities of Corpus Christi, Beaumont and Houston. Then, two weeks later, we did the same thing in Jacksonville and Tampa. All the while, our local journalists there were dealing with trauma in their own lives.

That’s the kind of exceptional things we and other good local broadcasters do to make our communities better.

But it’s also what we do every day that makes communities stronger, and brings them together. Every day, our stations use their storytelling talents to make people know, care about, and listen to, people they would otherwise never interact with. We give a voice to the voiceless, comforting the afflicted, and when necessary, afflicting the comfortable.

True localism is a great antidote to the toxins dividing the people of our nation. As local journalists know, it is simplistic to call any state entirely “red” or “blue” because local communities are complex and varied. Think New York City is all liberal? Go to Staten Island. Think Texas is all conservative? Go to Austin. Two nights ago, our Dallas sportscaster from WFAA, a self-proclaimed “good old boy” who grew up in a small almost all-white town in Oklahoma...and a military veteran from the Vietnam era...gave a stirring and emotional commentary about the NFL anthem controversy. It’s gone viral across the nation. I encourage you to watch it.

Great localism undermines division and creates community by empowering citizens to know about their city, their neighbors. No good local journalist would be so dismissive and condescending as to ever talk about “flyover” states.

It is in our interest as a society to ensure that localism continues to be a value that is prized by media companies, advertisers and communities. But in our emerging digital news ecosystem, it is localism that is most at risk.

What do we need to ensure that localism can continue? At TEGNA, it’s about innovation, innovation, innovation.

But in this new and dynamic ecosystem, we will require flexibility in how we work, and in the scale we will need to succeed, and in the partners we will need to work with.

A critical first step is to move away from archaic government rules that restrict this flexibility, from FCC ownership restrictions to anachronistic antitrust market definitions.

Ownership reform is critical to giving broadcasters the financial wherewithal to continue to invest in local reporting. No one else is doing it, so if we don't continue to serve this role, communities across the country will be uninformed and in the dark.

Local broadcasters are artificially hampered by FCC rules that no other industry has. Cable, wireless, and tech companies have become giants, while even our biggest local broadcast companies are tiny compared to the Charters, AT&T's, Facebooks, Googles, and Microsofts of the world. Those are our competitors, but we have to compete with both arms tied behind our back. Since they don't do local, why are we held back?

But it's not government regulation that makes us care about our communities, it's in our DNA. And it's good business. We have natural incentives to be tied to each and every community across the country, and in a way that no other industry does. Local journalists making local decisions about how best to serve their community. That's what TEGNA and other great local broadcasters do. The federal government should get behind that mission and support it. Ownership reform is essential to allow us to live and breathe in today's economy.

A renaissance in localism can show an America that isn't divided, but united in its love of country and community...an America that can disagree with civility because those with differing views are part of the same community...an America that understands, rather than assumes.

This is the America we believe in as local broadcasters. Let us show it to you.