

**Remarks by William E. Kennard
Accepting The Media Institute's
2021 American Horizon Award
October 20, 2021**

Thank you so much. I am deeply honored to receive this award. And even more so because it was presented by my friend and former colleague, Randall Stephenson. Randall is one of the most effective and inspiring leaders I have ever known. Having the opportunity to work with him has been an amazing gift.

In fact, I've gotta tell you, being here today, I feel like the luckiest guy in the world.

Forrest Gump famously said that, "Life is a box of chocolates, you never know what you're gonna get."

In my case, when I got out of college, I didn't have a clue about what I wanted to do with my life. So, like a lot of people who don't have a clue about what to do, I went to law school.

I came to Washington, D.C., to practice law, not because I was sure I even wanted to be a lawyer, but because I had become interested in communications policy and technology in college and had a vague sense that it might be interesting to do something at the intersection of law and communications policy.

Now remember, this was pre-Internet, so it was before telecom policy was cool.

I landed in a law firm in D.C. in the 1980s and within a few years, I ended up getting a front-row seat to what has become the most important technological revolution of our lifetimes.

Through a series of completely unpredictable events, I was fortunate to get the opportunity to chair the FCC, literally at the dawn of the Internet.

It was a chance to lead the FCC at a time when government had an especially important role in shaping the rules and policies that would define investment and growth of the Internet economy.

Steve Jobs told people on his team at Apple that they should strive to invent products that would "put a dent in the universe." It's a great way to think about bringing ambition to our work every day.

How fortunate I have been and frankly, all of us who work in this field have been, to shape the course of technologies that have profoundly changed the world. How fortunate that we can devote our careers to shaping something that literally defines this period in human history – the Information Age.

We sometimes mark the beginning of that age as the commercialization of the Internet in the mid-nineties, and the proliferation of wireless phones about that same time.

And today, as chair of the board of AT&T, it is so interesting to be part of a company that has defined innovation in communications technology since the invention of the telephone.

This is a company founded by Alexander Graham Bell in 1885 as the American Telegraph & Telephone Company. This is a company that time and again, day in and day out, has had to reinvent itself to stay on the cutting edge of innovation – for 136 years – to consistently retain its title as one of the world’s leading communications companies.

And the pace of innovation in our field only keeps accelerating – with the advent of IoT and AI and VR and AVs and EVs – and the whole alphabet soup of innovation that we are living through – all of it transforming our world at breakneck speed. It’s more exciting than ever before.

Look, I have had opportunities in this field that I could never have imaged. For me, it’s been an amazing and very fulfilling journey. So, I am profoundly grateful for this award, for the recognition of my work – for the important work of the Media Institute – and to all of you for sharing this moment with me.

So, thank you all very much.