

**Remarks by Curtis LeGeyt, President & CEO
National Association of Broadcasters
At The Media Institute's
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(as prepared for delivery)**

Thank you, Rick. It's a real pleasure to be with all of you today.

It's been nearly two months since I've stepped into the role as NAB president and CEO. I appreciate this opportunity to talk about the importance of local television and radio and our advocacy to protect broadcasters' vital service.

Local broadcast journalists are a beacon of our democracy. We ensure our communities are informed and have a powerful voice to fight back against injustice. From the first moon landing to 9/11, from racial justice protests to our coverage of the pandemic, broadcasters give us a window into the most pivotal moments in our history.

Local broadcast reporting is the most trusted source of information in communities across the country. We know it, and survey after survey shows it. We are working every day to fulfill our mission and earn that confidence.

Yet it is not just our coverage of the headlines that makes local broadcasters unique.

I'm reminded of a story that Freda Ross, the news director of radio station WBAP in Dallas, shared with our staff about the impact of the pandemic on her station's work. She told us, "I got a phone call in the newsroom one day. A man said, 'Ma'am, I don't have any food. I don't know where to go ... so, I just knew if I called you, you'd be able to tell me where to go.'" So, she gave him that information. And he thanked her and said, "Ma'am, you just fed my kids."

Freda is one of thousands of local broadcasters providing these kinds of lifelines in their communities every day. Our listeners and viewers know they can turn to us. There is no other medium that combines our reach with a local focus. And our service has never been more evident than over the past two years, during which broadcasters faced their own enormous challenges: Economically as advertising revenues plummeted ... health-wise as broadcasters stayed on the job to keep their stations on the air ... and physically as journalists have endured increased amounts of bullying and violence.

Yet broadcasters persevered. My members know that their duty to inform and find answers may put them in harm's way. But they go about their work, day in and day out, because it is critical and needed now more than ever.

In my decade at NAB, I have never been more proud to represent this industry. Whether they are radio or television, small market or large, network or affiliate, I've seen that broadcasters' public service commitment is the rule rather than the exception. In today's media landscape, we are the antidote to social media disinformation and cable news politicization. We are serving our

audiences with fact-based reporting, entertainment, and information that binds communities together rather than dividing them.

Today, I want to briefly outline four areas where policymakers must focus to ensure broadcasters can compete and thrive in the current media environment. Local broadcasting is doing its part to serve our communities at the very time that they need it most. Now we look forward to working with Congress and the FCC to do their part to ensure broadcasters' ability to innovate and grow our uniquely free service.

First, Congress must take action to rein in the gatekeeping ability of the Big Tech giants who are stifling the economics of local news.

A 2021 study found that local broadcasters lose an estimated \$2 billion annually when our content is accessed through Google and Facebook. But this is not a copyright problem, it is one of market power. Broadcasters and all local media rely on these platforms to reach online audiences. We have no other choice. Yet their market dominance allows them to offer us "take it or leave it" compensation terms that significantly devalue our product.

During his testimony before the Senate Antitrust Subcommittee earlier this month, Joel Oxley, general manager of WTOP here in Washington, summarized Big Tech's unfair advantage.

He said: "Consider the big storm that just blew through the Northeast over the weekend ... a Nor'easter ... blizzard conditions. Tons of work at a lot of cost and time for local broadcasters to cover it for millions of people. But not for Facebook, Google, and the like. They simply take our coverage, profit from it, and virtually nothing comes back to us. If we don't find a way to monetize our content better by having true partnerships with the big platforms, we will not be around – and neither will our coverage."

Without broadcasters, lives would have been risked during that storm. But there is no long-term business model for local news if we don't level the playing field.

That is why Congress must pass the Journalism Competition and Preservation Act.

This bill will allow stations to jointly negotiate the terms and conditions for their local content when it is accessed through the large tech platforms.

There is simply too much at stake if we don't confront Big Tech's online dominance. A recent study by the Brookings Institution shows that Americans are harmed when local news suffers. Inadequate local news – and therefore less information about local and state issues – has been linked to more government corruption, less competitive elections, and weaker municipal finances.

And make no mistake, as local newspapers have shuttered, local broadcasters are filling that void. According to the Pew Research Center, local broadcast television stations employed more than half of the local news jobs across the country. But we need congressional action to ensure

we can continue to provide our vital service, especially as consumers access our content through these tech platforms.

This brings me to my second point: Lawmakers and regulators must modernize media ownership laws to reflect the realities of the marketplace. A report released last Congress by Senate Commerce Chair Maria Cantwell noted that Google and Facebook control an estimated 77 percent of locally focused digital advertising. Yet broadcasters still operate under a set of rules that pretend they only compete with one another.

Broadcasters are adapting – our business models and content – to today’s rapidly changing media landscape. But outdated laws force us to compete with one arm tied behind our back for advertising dollars and audience.

Congress and the FCC must take a fresh look at whether these decades-old regulations are helping or impeding broadcast competition and media diversity.

Third, we would urge the FCC to reorient how it thinks about broadcast policy more broadly.

One hundred years ago, Congress established a system in which broadcast stations are licensed to provide a free service to local communities across the country in the public interest. Broadcasters take these public interest obligations seriously and go far above and beyond in serving their listeners and viewers every day.

But to fulfill Congress’s vision, it is imperative that the FCC recognize that the broadcast industry’s ability to function in the public interest is fundamentally premised on its economic viability. This means the Commission must consider whether each existing and new regulation will help or impede broadcasters’ ability to thrive in a media environment dominated by other platforms. It means embracing the tremendous consumer benefits of ATSC 3.0 and adopting policies that enable its growth. And it means the FCC working hand-in-hand with broadcasters, to help us attract leading talent from all backgrounds to ensure our stations better reflect the diversity of the communities we serve.

We are eager to work with Chairwoman Rosenworcel and the Commission to ensure a U.S. broadcast industry that leads the world in providing the unique localism that no other medium can replicate. But if broadcast regulatory reforms remain bogged down in all that could go wrong instead of all that could go right, we will not succeed.

Finally, we urge congressional support for the Local Radio Freedom Act. This legislation opposes a performance fee on local radio stations that would be financially devastating and hurt their listeners.

Radio stations invest considerable amounts of money in producing content, employing on-air talent, and updating the equipment they need to run successful stations. In many areas across the country, Americans’ only connection during times of crisis is the voice they hear on the radio. NAB welcomes a discussion on music licensing reforms that simplify the system and grow the

pie for creators while ensuring an economically viable broadcast industry. But a one-sided stand-alone performance fee on local radio stations will undermine our service.

In closing, I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you all today and am grateful for the mission of The Media Institute.

Local journalism is the lifeblood of American democracy.

NAB will continue do its part to aggressively advocate for policies to ensure that broadcasters can continue our legacy of service to the American public. And, I hope that, working together, we will ensure broadcasting's continued growth and evolution as an indispensable and irreplaceable American institution.

I look forward to answering your questions.
