

**Keynote Remarks of NAB President & CEO Curtis LeGeyt**  
**Featured Speaker at The Media Institute's**  
**2023 'Free Speech America' Gala**  
**October 19, 2023**

Dick, thank you for that kind introduction, and thanks to all of you for joining us this evening. Special thanks also to The Media Institute for hosting this gala, and to the staff and servers here at The Four Seasons for putting on a tremendous event. Let's give them a round of applause.

Tonight, we celebrate the bedrock principles of our democracy – free speech and the vital role of a free press. And in that vein, it is a privilege to be honoring two exceptional individuals – renowned author and journalist Bob Woodward, and former FCC chairman Michael Powell – true champions of our First Amendment rights.

Bob's unwavering commitment to truth and accountability has not only shaped the course of history but inspired generations of journalists and writers. His remarkable work not only unveiled the dark secrets of Watergate but illuminated the importance of fearless investigative reporting. Over five decades, Bob's reporting and engaging writing style have given readers a front row seat to the inner workings behind every major political event of our time, and has held every administration accountable – Democrat or Republican. Bob's career serves as a powerful testament to the importance of investigative journalism to shine a light on those in power, impartially.

And at a time when those in power can't seem to agree on much, we are honoring a great statesman and someone who has spent his career successfully forging relationships on both sides of the aisle – Michael Powell. At the helm of the FCC, Michael helped to usher in a new era in digital media while upholding the principles of a free press. Now, as the president and CEO of NCTA, he continues to advocate for innovations that enable freedom of speech and open discourse. Michael is truly the gold standard for how to cut through divisions – whether in Washington or in the board room – to get things done for the good of the American people.

With our nation at a crucial crossroads – where the trust, integrity, and authenticity of journalism is at stake – we need people like Bob and Michael now more than ever.

Like our two distinguished honorees, if you are in this room, you have dedicated yourself to upholding the ideals of our First Amendment. Whether you are a journalist, a policymaker, a media executive, or an advocate, I applaud you for it and I stand with you.

And we must stand together, because – put simply – the challenges have never been greater while the stakes have never been higher. The credibility of responsible fact-based journalism is under daily attack, and meanwhile our society is under siege by the relentless tide of misinformation online. This creates a double-edged sword where the simple fact of reporting the truth can often be perceived (or at least characterized) as taking a side or having a bias.

Let's take stock of what we are up against. Nearly 70 percent of Americans report coming across fake news on social media. And according to the Pew Research Center, an overwhelming majority of Americans believe that "false information online" is a major threat to our democracy. Yet this is where our young people consume their news. And it is where our most marginalized communities – from rural America to immigrants and communities of color – are disproportionately impacted.

And this problem is only worsening. As Axios recently reported, "The rise of cheap and easy-to-use AI tools, the lack of legal guardrails for their deployment, and relaxed content moderation policies at tech companies are creating the conditions for a perfect misinformation storm," which could drive democracies to the tipping point.

And we know that this misinformation, and the resulting distrust, have dire consequences. We experience it in our daily lives, whether it's in our communities, amongst our friends and coworkers, or at a Thanksgiving dinner. How many of these simmering disagreements could have been prevented if we were working off a common set of facts?

We see it in our national politics. According to Morning Consult, just 37 percent of Americans believe the upcoming 2024 election will be both honest and open, and nearly two-thirds believe that disinformation will influence the outcome.

And the conflicts abroad are constant reminders that the threat of disinformation is equally damaging beyond our borders, and in many cases a tool of war. In the immediate aftermath of the recent horrific terrorist attacks on Israel, so-called "breaking news" claimed there were additional air assaults – but in actuality, it was footage of fireworks celebrations and clips from a video game. The amount of fake photos and videos accessible on social media reached an unprecedented level in a matter of minutes.

To underscore the significance of the problem, Wendy McMahon, president and CEO of CBS News, stated that of the thousands of videos that CBS sifted through to report on the attacks, only 10 percent of them were usable or authentic. Thankfully, CBS and other responsible broadcasters are doing the hard work of thoroughly reviewing footage before airing it on their stations. Our broadcast network journalists also were quickly on the ground, putting their own lives at risk, to bring the facts back to the viewers at home. The social media and big tech companies are doing no such thing!

Years into tech's experiment to hold up crowd-sourced social media content as a more "democratized" form of news gathering, it is safe to say that it can never replace what journalists do, which is to provide the facts that calm the storms.

Journalists in this room and across the world put themselves in harm's way to cover the news, hold governments to account, shine a light on private actors' wrongdoing, and seek justice. This has never been a more important task.

Whether it is local or national – broadcast, print, or digital – your outlets are the bedrock of our democracy, and the public must be able to rely on us.

If we aren't working every day to push back on these challenges, no one is. We all need to up our game and be relentless to ensure that future generations can access and easily identify factual news and information, the very information that keeps us safe and helps us make informed decisions.

It may seem daunting. But the simple, undeniable truth is that what you do, trusted journalism, is the antidote to misinformation. And given the divisiveness in Congress and potential tsunami of political attacks that will accompany the upcoming election season, America's leadership may need to come from our newsrooms delivered in the form of facts.

In closing, I want to thank you again for being here. When we leave here tonight, I ask you to remember this: Throughout history, our free press has endured through chaos and strife to victory and triumph. Bob, Michael, and all of you are the custodians of this truth, entrusted with the critical mission of reporting the facts, uncovering corruption, and amplifying the voices of our diverse communities.

Working together, we will ensure that the strength and freedom of the press are unwavering.

Thank you.