

**REMARKS OF
FCC COMMISSIONER ANNA M. GOMEZ
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Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to be back at the Media Institute. I believe I spoke at one of these lunches in 2009 – but it was so long ago that it's not even listed on the Media Institute website for me to confirm. Considering the timing, however, I'm 90% sure I was talking about the digital television transition, but I can assure you that our conversation today will be different.

I really appreciate the range of topics the Media Institute covers as it takes on the full breadth of the cross-disciplinary industry in which we all work.

As a young lawyer, new to the FCC... a few years ago... the range of matters the Commission had before it was awe inspiring. FCC commissioners have long been expected to bring expertise to matters across a range of topics that do not always seem obviously related. The Commission authorized the first communications satellite launch of Telstar I in 1962. Since then, the agency has implemented the break-up of AT&T, invented the process for auctioning spectrum that remains the gold standard for the world, continues to participate internationally at the International Telecommunication Union, and ensures that broadcasters serve the public interest.

That means an FCC commissioner needs to develop a deep understanding of technology, competition policy, international relations, and First Amendment law. A “renaissance” lawyer so to speak. As a result of hard work, persistence, and some luck, I have had the privilege of working on transformational rulemakings at the Commission, standing up the First Responder Network Authority (commonly known as FirstNet), representing the interests of some of our country's largest and most innovative corporations, and representing the United States in international spectrum negotiations. And the cool thing about being a commissioner is that my area of expertise has now been expanded to encompass the media space, and I am bringing my varied history to consider these issues that are critical at this time.

So, what am I going to focus on today? News and how I approach it.

Stepping back, I have always been an avid consumer of news. My sources of content, however, have changed dramatically over the years. When I was young, I got my news by listening to the radio and watching TV. As a teenager, believe it or not, I got much of my news from MTV. Seriously. Kurt Loder was Walter Cronkite to a lot of my generation. Unfathomable in today's world, MTV once covered events such as a town hall with President Bill Clinton, the death of Kurt Cobain, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Later on, I started to read print newspapers regularly. And now that I'm 30... plus... I consume news on the radio, on television, through newspapers – though in digital form now – in addition to listening to journalism on podcasts.

Many of us... now in our 30s... plus... lament that younger generations are consuming news and media in new and suspicious ways: Instagram reels, TikToks, YouTube shorts, and more. I see this, and I am not at all surprised that young people want to be both entertained *and* informed. They always have, and they always will. And, they are simply not entertained by the same things that we were. That is why our media landscape continues to evolve over time.

One thing does stand out clearly about the era of news media we are in now. We cannot blindly trust the information that we consume.

When Walter Cronkite said, “That’s the way it is,” that’s the way it was. The news was the news. And very few felt the need to question it. But times have changed.

I know I’m not breaking news when I say there is a lack of trust in journalism today.

And really, this is not new. A lesson from history clues us into the power of biased or unreliable reporting. In 1898, when the US battleship, the Maine, sunk in Havana harbor, newspaper publishers took the reins. They employed hyperbole and played on the emotions of their audience in their reporting. Though the Maine was sunk by a mine explosion in the harbor, journalists Hearst and Pulitzer published rumors that the incident was a Spanish plot to sink the ship. We certainly can’t blame this reporting alone for the anti-Spanish sentiments in the US or the start of the Spanish American War, but biased reporting in this case set the tone for the events that would follow and the public’s impression of the war.

This is why localism, competition and diversity are the Commission’s bedrock principles of media ownership. Having a variety of diverse voices in each community is key to the public interest. And while placing our collective trust in the hands of the homogenous few may have started the mistrust in news and information, changes in technology have exacerbated the problem.

Serious concerns about dis- or mis-information today go further with the help of technological advancements. Artificial Intelligence and its products such as deepfakes and voice cloning have widened the reach of misinformation. While consuming media has always required an understanding of context and tone, discerning misinformation, especially when it is presented in a hyper-realistic way, proves to be far more difficult today than discerning satire or comedy on the Daily Show, which delivered news in an entertaining and informative way to millennials.

A couple of weeks ago, AI voice cloning was used to impersonate President Joe Biden in an attempt to influence a federal election primary. This is serious. Misinformation in this form poses a threat to our democracy. And I am proud of the work the FCC is doing to address the harms of Artificial Intelligence as they relate to robocalls and robotexts. Two weeks ago, we issued a declaratory ruling, clarifying that calls made with AI-generated voices without prior consent are illegal. This is an important step towards holding bad actors accountable and limiting the spread of false information by seemingly trustworthy voices.

Misinformation also poses dangers to public safety. Earlier this month, the New York Times published a story titled “When the Storm Online Is Worse Than the One Outside.” It detailed an incident in which an emergency preparedness enthusiast without expertise in meteorology posted on social media about a potential #ARkStorm headed for California. Despite the lack of scientific evidence to support a severe or catastrophic flood across the state, those on social media continued to express their worry about the storm. Stories like this one are amplified on social media, motivated by the fear and panic they instill. And what if the story had been to downplay a significant storm? When it comes to public safety, we cannot afford to have untrustworthy sources clouding our view of reality.

Concern about dis- or mis- information is one of the top media issues raised to me in my role as commissioner. And it is one where, frankly, regulatory options are limited, as they should

be. The Commission is not in the business of regulating content. The criticality of the First Amendment to democracy cannot be overstated. Let me say this again to make sure I am crystal clear, I have zero interest in regulating what goes on in a newsroom. Our democracy needs a press free from interference from regulators like myself.

I approach this issue as both an FCC commissioner and a concerned citizen. I have had the benefit of 30 years of experience working in technology, media, and telecom law and policy. And I have had a lifetime of appreciating the evolution of news media as a consumer. I now have the opportunity to combine my policy expertise with my personal experience to contribute to the thought leadership in this space. What a gift.

My thinking continues to evolve, but I see my role at this time as focusing on consumer education. What that means is using my platform as an FCC commissioner to amplify the many and varied efforts of others because we, the collective we, need to meet people where they are. Not everyone consumes media in the same way and not everyone views the media that they consume in the same way.

I think giving consumers tools for understanding and consuming media is both powerful and necessary. I have been heartened by the initiatives that I've come across that are aimed at helping people discern whether content is reliable, and I want to highlight a few.

The first is water marking. Water marking can be a helpful tool to label content that has been generated or altered by artificial intelligence. With content on social media being shared and reshared quickly, and often without a second thought, it is critical that we have indicators informing us when the content we are viewing is not entirely organic. Adobe has been a leader in this space, setting their goal for watermarks to be the "ultimate signal of transparency in digital content."

The second is preserving content authenticity. The Content Authenticity Initiative is a group of content creators, journalists, activists, and leaders working to address misinformation by adding a layer of tamper-evident provenance to their digital content. Their work aims to provide consumers with a traceable history of the alterations made to an original piece of content.

The third is dis- and mis- information education. In the same way that taking an art appreciation class can help people better engage with the art they consume, I believe that media literacy education efforts will help people better engage with the online media that they consume. Productive engagement requires education.

MediaWise and Noticias Telemundo, for example, have developed a course to educate on radio misinformation, biases in the media, confirmation bias, identifying trustworthy sources, and how graphics can be misleading. They have partnered with Poynter, a nonprofit media institute and newsroom that provides fact-checking, media literacy, and journalism ethics training to citizens and journalists. These educational resources are also offered to Spanish speakers and available through a WhatsApp course.

These are just some of the tools that I've come across that I hope will be helpful to consumers that are navigating an increasingly confusing online environment. At the end of the day, real discernment skills should transcend the type of media being consumed. People should

be able to carry these skills and tools that they acquire as they continue to navigate the changing media landscape.

So, how do I amplify the message? I do it by taking opportunities to speak, such as this one, to highlight what I know and to encourage industry insiders such as yourselves to educate me about your efforts. I also work to spread the knowledge when it seems relevant.

For example, last week I had the great honor of being on a panel with Edward James Olmos, legendary actor and founder of the Latino Film Institute, a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating infrastructure for equity, diversity, and excellence for the Latino community in the entertainment industry that is investing in youth media education. I took the opportunity to connect him with leaders in the media literacy space. While it was a small step, I hope that the impacts will be far-reaching. And I am always looking for ways to do more. So please, join me in spreading the word about these technologies and education efforts and reach out to my office if you have other ideas for how we can help educate and empower consumers.

Thank you for having me here today.