



Larry Walke

Associate General Counsel
Legal & Regulatory Affairs
1771 N Street, NW • Washington DC 20036-2800
(202) 429-5313 • Fax: (202) 775-3526

October 23, 2003

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: RM-10803

Dear Ms. Dortch:

Enclosed please find the written statement of James M. Keelor, President and COO of Liberty Corporation, delivered at the Commission's Localism Field Hearing in Charlotte, North Carolina on October 22, 2003. Attached to Mr. Keelor's statement are numerous letters, notes and other items from local community action groups and individual local citizens praising radio and television stations for their efforts to support local service projects and deliver programming that serves the interests and concerns of their local communities.

Please include both the statement and the attached letters in the above-captioned proceeding.

Please direct any questions concerning this matter to the undersigned.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lawrence A. Walke".

Lawrence A. Walke

**Statement of James M. Keelor
Before the Federal Communications Commission
Broadcast Localism Task Force
October 22, 2003**

Good evening, Mr. Chairman and Commissioners, my name is Jim Keelor. I am President and COO of Liberty Corporation, which is headquartered in Greenville, South Carolina.

Liberty owns 15 network-affiliated television stations in the South and Midwest, in markets ranging from number 50 - Louisville, Kentucky, to market number 180 - Jonesboro, Arkansas. Here in North Carolina, Liberty has WWAY, the ABC affiliate in Wilmington, and in Columbia, South Carolina we own WIS, the NBC affiliate.

I started out in broadcasting over 36 years ago as a local reporter, and later worked as a news anchor, a news director, and a field producer for NBC News before moving into station management. Commissioners, I feel like I have seen the broadcasting industry from the ground up, and that's why I'm grateful for this chance to share with you some of the remarkable efforts of local television stations, and Liberty's stations in particular, to serve the interests of our local communities.

For example, shortly after beginning work, every new employee of Liberty receives a letter from me welcoming them to the company. This letter begins: "We [here at Liberty] are very serious about our commitment to the communities we serve." And while there are far too many examples of this commitment to describe here, I would like to mention just a few of our stations' efforts.

First, as you know, the Carolinas have an unfortunate history of hurricanes and other severe weather, and over the years, both WWAY and WIS have dedicated

thousands of hours to covering storms, including Hurricanes Isabel and Hugo. Liberty has invested millions of dollars in state-of-the-art weather tracking equipment, multiple live news trucks for both stations, and other equipment, all of which allows the stations to broadcast localized emergency warnings and reports on local community recovery efforts. We also sponsor and air town meetings on emergency preparation. For example, our WIS Storm Team held a series of town meetings this past summer where local citizens could ask questions about hurricanes and severe weather of the people we bring, such as representatives of the National Weather Service, the Red Cross, and the Better Business Bureau. WIS also helped publish a Hurricane Tracking Map and Survival Guide that we made available at local banks and on WIS' Internet website. As a result, both stations are among the first places citizens look to for potentially life-saving emergency information during hurricanes and other severe weather.

Liberty's stations also devote a substantial amount of free airtime to covering local politics. WWAY and the North Carolina Broadcasters Association have a 25-year history of producing debates among statewide political candidates. WIS produced and aired live debates before both the primary and general elections for Governor in 2002, including a live, hour-long debate between the Republican candidates for Governor during the week before the runoff primary election. Also, in the weeks leading up to the general election, WIS aired live interviews during its top-rated 7:00pm newscast with 18 candidates for federal and statewide offices, and aired extensive profiles of eight different key issues in the races for U.S. Senate and Governor. WIS also partnered with local organizations to produce and air five separate hour-long debates during the 7:00-8:00pm hour involving candidates for the Senate and Governor.

Our stations also recognize their special place in the community as a source of community action, education, and local culture. For example, WIS, our station in Columbia, runs one program we are especially proud of, called Families Helping Families. This program, now its 13th year, gives our local citizens a chance to make a difference by directly sponsoring a child, a senior citizen, or an entire family during the holidays. Every year WIS launches the program around Thanksgiving by providing a phone bank for volunteers, and running numerous promotions and appeals on the air. For at least two weeks of the program, WIS airs live reports from the phone bank during each of its four daily newscasts, produces and airs stories about some of the beneficiaries, and airs a full week of stories on its evening newscast when the families pick up their gifts. Every year about 1200 families in South Carolina benefit from this program, and the gifts collected by the program number in the thousands and fill a warehouse.

WIS recently launched another terrific program recently called A Class Act. This program helps teachers in South Carolina equip their classrooms with needed supplies in the face of statewide cuts in education. First, WIS set up an on-line meeting place for teachers and donors on its popular Internet website, where teachers can post the needs of their classrooms and where local citizens can respond with donations. For several weeks, WIS aired two stories a day on its evening newscast promoting the program, and other announcements during other parts of the day. Then, when donors started assisting teachers, WIS featured many of these stories on the air. The program doesn't end until December, but since it began in September, WIS has heard from many grateful teachers who have been able to improve the quality of the work they can do in their classrooms.

In one remarkable case, a local high-tech firm was motivated by the program to donate 250 computers to the effort.

For its part, WWAY led the way in updating the public on the progress of the new Cameron Art Museum in Wilmington, and heavily promoted the museum's grand opening, including the free production of a 30-minute news special on the museum that aired just prior the museum's opening. WWAY also organized and aired a very successful Town Hall Meeting on the proposed convention center in Wilmington, which may be the biggest issue facing local officials in Wilmington right now. Our Town Hall Meeting was the first time all parties involved in the project were brought together in the same room, and it gave the 1000 people who attended the event a chance to ask questions and voice their concerns.

Mr. Chairman and Commissioners, I realize that I've spent quite a bit of time praising Liberty's stations in North and South Carolina, but it is important to note that Liberty is not special or unique in its commitment to localism. This is what broadcasters must strive to do. Local television stations know that, given their unique place in the community, it is important for them to be good corporate citizens.

But we also recognize know that, in this era of six nationwide TV networks, 80 cable channels, high-speed Internet, and all the other sources of information out there, we have to differentiate ourselves if we're going to be able to attract and hold the attention of our viewers. And the best way to do that is to be closely involved in our communities, and responsive to the concerns of our local audience. If we're going to be able to deliver competitive programming, we need to know the names of our high school principals, and the fire chief, and all of our neighbors.

Working for a local television station is a challenging and exciting job, but I can assure you that most rewarding thing about local television has little to do with running a network's prime-time line-up, or reporting on California's recall election. Instead, it has everything to do with educating, informing, and partnering with people in our local communities.

That is something the people who run Liberty Corporation learned a long time ago, and it is the main reason that we have been able to survive and flourish as a group of stations located in small markets for so many years.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I'd be happy to answer any questions you or anyone in the audience may have.