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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
LOCALISM HEARING  
Portland High School  
Portland, Maine  
June 28, 2007  
8:00 p.m. to 11:55 p.m. session

Federal Communication Commission Commissioners:  
Commissioner Michael J. Copps, Chair  
Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate  
Commissioner Robert McDowell  
Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein

Moderator:  
Clyde Ensslin

Panelists:  
Spencer Albee, Portland-area musician and promoter

Rob Blethen, Advertising Director, Portland Press Herald

Suzanne Goucher, President and CEO, Maine Association of

Broadcaster Cary Pahigian, President and General  
Manager, Portland Radio Group/Saga Communications

Reverend Peter Panagore, First Radio Church of Maine

Daniel Panici, Professor, University of Southern Maine

Cynthia Phinney, Business Manager, International  
Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 1837

James B. Shaffer, Dean and Professor of Business,  
University of Southern Maine School of Business

Tim Stone, Trustee, WSCA-LP, Portsmouth, New Hampshire  
Community Radio Station

Anthony Vigue, Manager, South Portland Community  
Television

Gordon Wark, President and General Manager, NEPSK Inc.,  
WAGM-TV8, Presque Isle, Maine

Reporter:  
Daphne G. Estes, RPR/CP

FILED/ACCEPTED  
JUL 25 2007  
Federal Communications Commission  
Office of the Secretary

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COMMISSIONER COPPS: Halfway to the finish point. I thank everybody who is still here for remaining, and I hope some others will be joining us, too.

Let me turn the program back over to Clyde to moderate our chorus from here to the end of the journey.

MR. ENSSLIN: Thank you, Commissioner Copps.

As we move to the second panel discussion, I'd like to review the ground rules once again very briefly.

Panelists, each of you will have five minutes to make your remarks. I will be strictly enforcing this time limit to leave as much time as possible for public comment period following your panel presentation.

Members of the audience, once again, please listen respectfully to the panelists even if you disagree with the views that they express.

In alphabetical order, the second panel participants are Spencer Albee, who is a musician and promoter from the Portland area; Rob Blethen, the Advertising Director for the Portland Press Herald; Suzanne Goucher, President and CEO of the Maine Association of Broadcasters; Cary Pahigian, President and General Manager of the Portland Radio Group/Saga Communications; the Reverend Peter Panagore from the First Radio Church of Maine; Dan Panici, who is a

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professor at the University of Southern Maine; Cynthia Phinney, the business manager for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 1837; James Shaffer, Dean and Professor of Business at the University of Southern Maine School of Business; Tim Stone, a Trustee of the WSCA-LP, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Community Radio Station; Anthony Vigue, manager with the South Portland Community Television; and Gordon Wark, President and General Manager of the NEPSK Inc., TV 8 in Presque Isle.

Mr. Albee.

MR. ALBEE: I can't believe I'm speaking in front of the FCC, and it's not due to a wardrobe malfunction.

Good evening. My name is Spencer Albee, and I'm honored to have been called here today to speak on behalf of my friends and colleagues in Maine broadcasting. I understand that part of this hearing's purpose is to determine whether or not Maine-based corporate broadcasting is localizing their programming enough to sufficiently promote and develop local acts or artists.

I am pleased that you have decided to come to Portland, and now have the opportunity to witness a music scene that thrived and functioned without the imposition of Federal sanctions. And perhaps now you

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are seeing how blanket policies can hurt the individual, as, due to these regulations, we've recently seen the forced sale of two of the signals that regularly played local artists. Though localization of corporate radio on a national level should be encouraged, it's not a problem solved with blanket policy, nor was it a problem suffered here in Portland, Maine.

Let me make something perfectly clear: Portland, Maine has been an example by which all other markets should be judged. As a musician I have spent the past 12 years relentlessly touring the United States and Canada and have seen countless cities and experienced their music scenes. I have spent over a year living in our sister city, Portland, Oregon and got a real feel for what their music scene was all about. I've also been carted around from radio station to radio station on a national level by labels, both independent and major, and vied for the attention of hundreds of program directors as we tried, hopelessly for the most part, to be added to their stations.

Here in Portland, Maine as a local artist you can make a record in a world class studio with world class producers like Jonathan Wyman, get it mastered at arguably the finest mastering facility in the world by Grammy Award winning engineer Adam Ayan, while Bob

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Ludwig works on the new Led Zeppelin DVD or Paul McCartney album down the hall, and then, if appropriate, get it played on several radio stations, have it written about in many papers, and perhaps even go on TV to talk about it.

Let's think of where else in the nation that this is the case. I can tell you in all earnesty that in my broad experience of travel and employment in the music industry and music business, I have never witnessed a scene that comes even close to achieving the level of support for local and independent arts that Portland, Maine has.

I think it's fair to say that per capita, our scene has more talented, motivated musicians and people willing and eager to expose their work to the masses than most any city in America.

Though I've had extensive experience with many of the media outlets in Portland -- Fox 51, WCSH 6, WGME 13, WRED, The Portland Phoenix and Portland Press Herald, to name a few -- I'll speak of what I know best: Herb Ivy, Brian James, Charlie Gaylord, Mark Curdo, and Rob Riccitelli. This is a short list of people that variously program or spin on local radio. These five people, with only three signals, now reduced to one thanks to government regulations, have managed, in the

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past five years alone, to give substantial radio airplay and support to local artists including Rustic Overtones, Rocktopus, Vacationland, The Popsicko, Twisted Roots, Jason Spooner, The Coming Grass, Jon Nolan, Patty Griffin, As Fast As, Paranoid Social Club, Seekonk, Jeremiah Freed, Pete Kilpatrick, Animal Suit Driveby, Kate Schrock, 6GIG, Hiss And Chambers, Lost On Liftoff, Headstart, Even All Out, Tony McNaboe, Ray LaMontagne, Phantom Buffalo, Sarah Cox, Darien Brahms, Cambiata, and Loverless. Not only is this list incomplete, but I am also leaving out the hundreds of local artists that get their start on shows like Spinout and Greetings From Area Code 207. This list is also longer than most corporate radio station's entire playlists.

As an independent artist, I obviously have my reservations about corporate radio. In my opinion, corporate radio, for the most part, is a vampire sneaking through the windows of America's thriving music scenes and sucking the joy and personality out of them while they sleep. This will always be the case unless these companies are run with great care and attention to the cities they thrive off. That is why Portland was not in trouble, because though we had been listening to corporate radio now for many years, this is one of the few cases where corporate radio is listening back.

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I'm sure that there are local artists who feel slighted in that they haven't received the airplay they feel they deserve from any of these stations. Though that can be frustrating, artists must retain perspective and educate themselves on just what's happening on a national level and see that Portland artists, as a whole, have heightened access to radio play. Just because you buy a baseball doesn't mean you automatically pitch for the Red Sox.

There are many steps involved. Establishing a career in music takes years of legwork beyond simply creating the music. Here in Portland, when you hit your stride, radio will get behind you.

The market for new music anywhere in America is extremely harsh. Radio playlists grow shorter and shorter, and new acts have to struggle harder and harder just to achieve airplay. I have many friends in many bands from all over the world who have made remarks on how our radio stations get behind local records and shows.

Bands I've been in, worked with, and know personally have enjoyed the gratification of being able to have their craft broadcast to the masses and have been given a toehold from which they can forge careers in music for one reason alone: Portland radio plays

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local music. In this new world of cookie cutter bands and assimilated playlists, we stand alone on the short list of other cities that have managed to stay cool and stay local. It matters not who owns these stations, but rather who manages them.

I'll repeat: Portland, Maine has been the example by which all other markets should be judged.

Thank you.

(Audience applause.)

MR. ENSSLIN: Thank you, Mr. Albee.

Mr. Blethen, you have five minutes.

MR. BLETHEN: Commissioners Adelstein, Copps, McDowell, and Tate, I'm Rob Blethen. Thank you for asking me to be here today to share my thoughts on behalf of the Blethen family.

Our family is the steward of one of the relatively few family owned and operated journalism companies. We are a small player in the mix of mega media companies today, but we have a big commitment to serving our communities with quality journalism. We are intentionally not a conglomerate.

While we own papers in two cross-continental states -- Washington and Maine -- we do so because we have deep roots and a strong emotional commitment to both places.

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My siblings and cousins are members of the fifth generation of Blethens. While Frank Blethen, my uncle, continues as publisher of the Seattle Times and CEO of the Seattle Times Company, overseeing the six daily newspapers and six websites we operate, there are now four of the eleven in my generation who are on serious career paths within our small family of newspapers.

You may not know that our great, great grandfather, Alden Blethen, the founder of our company, was born and educated here in Maine despite spending several years as an indentured servant of sorts. He practiced law right here in Portland on Exchange Street, the same street as the downtown offices of the Portland Press Herald, before moving West where he eventually settled in Washington state in the middle of his life.

I serve as an executive with the Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram, and also serve on the Board of Directors for the Blethen Maine Newspapers. While I'm not a native Mainer, I have lived here in Portland for six years now, and I am proud that two of my children are native Mainers. I am involved in the Portland community as a board member with the Portland Boys and Girls Club and a member of the Marketing Committee for the United Way of Greater Portland. So you can see we do have deep roots here.

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I am grateful the Commission is providing this public forum on localism, and is also holding media ownership hearings throughout the United States. The job of the Commission as it relates to media ownership is a very important one. The policy decisions you make affect the lives of all American citizens. In fact, these decisions are foundational to our democracy, for how can citizens be effective citizens without accurate, timely, diverse news and information about the complex issues affecting our world, our country, those we elect, our cities, and our courts?

The decisions you make have great bearing on whether the news organizations reporting to citizens are all owned by a handful of giant corporations, or whether they are more diversely held, allowing for a greater diversity of views and content to better serve citizens at the local level. We are grateful you are taking the time to hear from citizens as you consider the affects of the important policies before you.

At the Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram, local news is our primary franchise. A newspaper is a public trust. Our business models focus on local journalism as a community service. No one in this market comes close to the number of reporters we have on the street. The local content these reporters create is

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what separates us from all mediums, including print, on the public airwaves, and online. According to a Gallup poll released in the last year, newspapers are still far ahead of Internet, television, and all other mediums when it comes to being a source for local news.

All this local content creates a substantial audience, one that is attractive to advertisers. And while news is important, local advertising is also important to our audience. Many readers pick up a newspaper primary for the ads. These local consumers want the information provided by our advertisers, and because of our vast reach in the community, local businesses wanting to get their messages out have a proven, cost effective means of doing so. This partnership is a good one and it adds to the economic vitality in our community.

Perhaps most importantly, it allows us to produce the great journalism that is so vital to our democracy. The Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram remains this community's primary journalistic enterprise and is essential to the information, news, and citizen engagement which is necessary to ensure a sense of community, quality government, social justice and inclusion.

Like many markets, much this journalism becomes the

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springboard for local bloggers, television, and radio. Despite some of the recent challenges in the newspaper business, when you look at our leadership, taking into account our online audience, we are reaching more people than ever.

I would like to add that it's particularly appropriate for the Commission to hold a forum on localism in Maine because fortunately for all of us who live there, to the best of my knowledge Maine is the only state where all of the daily newspapers are family owned. This allows us to have a long-term view of this business. All the families have a vested interest in the communities we serve, and aren't being dictated direction by faceless corporate conglomerates from out-of-state that are often only interested in short-term profits. We understand that content is king, and that our journalism is what will help us successfully navigate these uncharted waters.

I would also like to add that the broadcast entities in Maine are more responsive to local concern than I believe is the case in many other places. So we are, indeed, fortunate. But for how long? The economic pressures against local owners has never been greater. Competing in a rapidly changing marketplace is hard enough without laws and policies that work to promote

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media consolidation and against independent local ownership.

The FCC should do everything in its power to protect localism because the alternative is an accelerating trend toward media conglomerates with often little or no commitment to quality journalism or community service.

In closing, I urge the Commission to support localism and diversity by doing the following: Hold stations accountable to communities through a stronger lic --

MR. ENSSLIN: Mr. Blethen, your time is up. I'm sorry.

MR. BLETHEN: Thank you.

(Audience applause.)

MR. ENSSLIN: Ms. Goucher, you have five minutes.

MS. GOUCHER: Members of the Commission, it is my honor to welcome you to our beautiful state, and we certainly invite you to come back and visit us as tourists.

Prior to joining MAB in 1994, I was the news director at an AM/FM combo in Augusta, our state capitol. The company that owned the station was incorporated in Maine, but all of the money to buy the stations came from New York. I was never pressured to

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run New York news because our service area was the 50 miles surrounding Augusta. Just how is localism defined? By the money trail or by the signal area?

Here's Maine's brush with greatness. The late talk show host Jack Parr and Buffalo Bob Smith of Howdy Doody fame, both owned stations in Maine in the 1960's. Neither were Mainers, but their stations were and are Maine stations serving Maine communities.

In 1952 when the Commission lifted the freeze on TV license applications, it urged newspapers to apply on the theory that a newspaper could quickly ramp up a TV news operation. Here in Portland we had a newspaper/radio/TV cross-ownership situation for five decades, and nary was a concern raised that the market wasn't being served by a diversity of information.

The family that owned that TV station, along with the local families that owned a few of the other TV stations in our state, sold their stations in recent years as a direct result of the expense associated with the unfunded Federal mandate to convert to digital TV. Sellouts were forced by simple economics.

When the Commission approved Docket 8090 in 1983 it started dropping in the FM allocations across this countryside with no consideration for whether particular communities had the economic base to support a radio

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station. Of the 91 full-power FM stations currently on air in Maine, 41 were put on the air in 1983 or after. Today only two of those 41 stations remain as stand-alones. Maine has one of the lowest per capita income rates in the U.S., one of highest tax burdens, and some of the highest electric power rates in the nation. So it was almost inevitable that some of these stations could not survive as stand-alone operations. Some even went bankrupt in the economic downturn of the 1990's. You can't pay the electric bill for a 50,000 watt transmitter on good will and good intentions. Yet it seems that over the years, the Commission has refused to consider local economic conditions when setting its policies.

In Cumberland County, where Portland is located, there are 24 radio and TV stations owned by 13 separate entities. There are only two daily newspapers in Cumberland County, one of which is owned by Blethen Newspapers. There are 14 radio and TV stations owned by six separate entities licensed to the state capitol of Augusta and surrounding areas of Kennebec County. There are two daily newspapers in that area, both owned by Blethen Newspapers.

Some folks seem to think that big is bad, out of state is bad, and, in general, if you hold a broadcast

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license you are doing it all wrong. Conservatives think the media are too liberal; liberals think the media are too conservative. Broadcasting is an inherently local medium, regardless of where the money comes from; and Maine people are not shy about voting with their eyes and their ears and their channel changers, but they turn into Maine radio and TV stations by the hundreds of thousands everyday, so we must be doing something right.

Maine broadcast stations are managed and staffed by Maine people. They live here, work here, they care deeply about their communities, their schools, their government, and they share an abiding passion for serving those communities.

I would like to read into the hearing record the stack of paper, atta boy letters, and a representative sampling of all the news and public affairs issues covered on Maine stations in the month of March, state and local politics, healthcare, the environment.

I'd also like to read a portion of a letter to one of my TV stations from the foster parents of a 15-month-old boy named Alex, who had been badly beaten by his birth parents and was not expected to survive his injuries. The foster parents were trying to raise money for a special bed designed to prevent the boy from

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choking on his own saliva. The station did a story on him and also donated \$1,000 toward the bed. The foster parents wrote, we really have been blown away by the response from our community. The story shown on the news was so well done it captured our baby's gently loving face, and your staff was not only kind but genuinely caring. When he is no longer with us, I will let you do a story on him if you wish. Like his neurologist says, he will die from complications due to the severe abuse he has suffered. So many people have asked us to let them know when he passes. We have told them to watch your station, they will know first.

Letters like this are not the exception, they are the rule among Maine stations. Maine broadcasters reach out into their communities day after day to find and help the Alexes and thousands like them. Is it my privilege to represent the best group of broadcasters in America.

Thank you.

(Audience applause.)

MR. ENSSLIN: Thank you, Ms. Goucher.

Mr. Pahigian.

MR. PAHIGIAN: Thank you and good evening. Welcome to the Commissioners. Welcome to all. I am Cary Pahigian. I'm the president and general manager of Saga

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Communications/Portland Radio Group, seven radio stations based here in Maine. I'm a radio lifer. I started at 14 years old, and I speak -- I think I speak from a very unique perspective.

When I entered the radio industry at 14 years old, I was taught a couple of things. We're here to serve the community, we're here to help local businesses, we're here to entertain and inform our listeners, and we're here to work in a way that contributes to the community at all times.

And I've had the opportunity now to work for large companies, small companies, and some companies in between. What I can tell you is I've experienced pretty much the same environment and the same mission for all those size companies, from the smallest of the small to the largest of the large; and that is, it's all about service, and it is local control by local management and staff.

Nothing has really changed in the '70's, '80's, '90's and today, at least from what I see. I worked for very large companies back in the '70's and '80's, some of the largest including Westinghouse and Metromedia; and I worked for some very small companies as well, and the message has remained the same. Local employees at these large radio companies will even say

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now, many of us will say, that we had -- we have greater resources and more abilities today than we ever have.

Some of the things happening here in Portland here at the Portland Radio Group, and this is just a handful of sampling, if you will, of the things that we've done most recently, we operate a large news and talk radio station, WGAN, which has not shrunk in the news department, but actually expanded on the last five to ten years: More local news, more local news people. More generation of local news, news in the evenings, late nights, more coverage of breaking stories, something we're quite proud of.

We've introduced traffic reports into the market. We did not have traffic reports at one time, but, like many other communities, Portland is growing. There's traffic issues, and we now report on traffic constantly.

More weather reports. That radio station broadcasts each -- each month from the local chamber of commerce Eggs and Issues breakfast meetings. We talk to local community leaders live on the air, and highlight the many local topics that are discussed at that breakfast. We have a local access show on our country station; 30 years where people can buy and sell and swap, just like they did 20, 30 years ago, on the radio

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at no charge. We have a series of hometown heroes right now on our country station, WPOR. We are broadcasting live and saluting fire stations and police departments across the greater Portland area.

We have a pediatrician on each week on our adult contemporary station, WMGX, fielding calls from listeners on free advice or children's care from a pediatrician live and on the air each week. And we air numerous public affairs programming on all our stations that interview and talk to community leaders and give full access to almost any group who asks to be part of it.

We talked a lot about large media conglomerates. I'm here to tell you that they're not faceless people in ivory towers. Those people are me, they're my many coworkers and my friends and my colleagues, and many of the people you've heard from this evening.

Thank you for your time.

(Audience applause.)

MR. ENSSLIN: Thanks you Mr. Pahigian.

Mr. Panagore.

REVEREND PANAGORE: Thank you, Commissioners, for holding this forum tonight. Welcome to Maine. I'm Reverend Peter Panagore. I serve as the fifth minister of a unique ministry that has long served the

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nonsectarian public interest in the State of Maine and beyond.

In 1926, when AM radio was in its infancy, First Radio Parish Church of America, I'll call it First Radio after this, went on the air on WCSH-AM broadcasting on the fourth floor of the Eastland Hotel just up the street from here. For 81 years First Radio has remained an ecumenical multimedia mainline ministry. Under the current program name of DailyDevotions.org, we reach 96,000 viewers everyday, 365 days a year, on Maine's two NBC affiliates. Both stations, WCSH 6 and WLBZ 2 in Bangor, are owned by Gannett. Together, they donate our entire budget for production and air time. As an aside, WCSH 6 and WLBZ 2 are supportive of local programming, and we remain their largest donation.

Each Sunday morning, through Armed Forces Radio Network, DailyDevotions.org reaches a potential 1 million listeners of our neighbors in uniform globally. Our e-mail list is at 1,050. Our monthly newsletter reaches 5,000. We have 400 churches that subscribe to the newsletter, and we have 10,000 visitors to our daily website. All of this information becomes pertinent toward the end.

Through our ministry, I write and tell brief stories of inspiration, faith, hope, and reason that

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touch hearts and educate minds. We seek the sacred inside the secular. DailyDevotions.org is an old, beloved, and cutting edge multimedia nonprofit establishment. But to the point, and in contrast to long-positive local television experience, our radio experience of late has been less positive, with the notable exception of WHSN-FM in Bangor, and Ben Haskell, who I believe sat in this very seated earlier this evening.

When I began with First Radio in June of 2003, Reverend Dr. David R. Glusker was retiring after 18 years of service. Dr. Glusker remained as my tutor until 2003. During that summer, Dr. Glusker told me that First Radio was being broadcast each Sunday morning for 23 minutes on five radio stations in Maine, AM and FM, out of Gorham, Lewiston, Windham, and Auburn. These stations were locally owned by Radio Partners of Maine LP. Only two months later, at his official retirement in August of 2003, Dr. Glusker surprised me by saying that Nassau Broadcasting Holding, Inc., of New Jersey had come in and purchased all of those stations, and that Daily Devotions had been abruptly, and without explanation, cut from their lineup.

It made my workload lighter. That left our ministry with one station: WQSS out of Camden, Maine; a

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station that had been also recently purchased by an out-of-state organization, this time Clear Channel of San Antonio. Within months, the very generous station manager of QSS negotiated that we would be on also WCME out of Augusta. He was very kind to us; but within a year, the same general manager subsequently informed us that Clear Channel had made a decision further up the ladder to revamp their entire Sunday morning program of public service programming, and we were cut from both stations, providing us with one station remaining in Bangor.

I say that because while we are well respected on television, and, naturally, globally, we have lost our footing here in Maine on radio, through no fault of our own. If they had come to me and said, you know, we can't stand what you do, we don't like what you're saying, I would have been okay with that. But to be cut without any explanation, just that we're revamping, left kind of a bad taste.

It's been about a year now since we've gone on Armed Forces Radio, and we're also working in New York as well. But I can say that although we're expanding nationally and globally, Mainers tell us that they miss us on the morning radio programs. They miss our meditations. Our stories contain local imagery and

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anecdotes of New England life that can't be replicated by citizens of New Jersey or San Antonio, as wonderful as those places are. The uplifting ingredients of our folksy wisdom and edifying spirituality remain crucial to and desired by our neighbors. We bring a little slice of goodness every morning under the weight of a lot of bad news. That's what we do.

Thank you very much for having me here tonight.

(Audience applause.)

MR. ENSSLIN: Thank you, Reverend Panagore.

Professor Panici.

MR. PANICI: Honorable members of the FCC, fellow panelists, and members of the public, good evening. It is an honor to be here to share my views considering this very important topic: Localism in broadcasting. I come before you as a professor of media studies, a parent, and a member of the greater Portland community. Given the time parameters, I will be brief and direct with my comments.

We have sufficient evidence to suggest that localism, however we define it, local ownership, local expression, the creation of a local dialogue, is on the decline while medial consolidation is on the rise. We have sufficient evidence to suggest that a majority of the media content that we consume is controlled by a

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media conglomerate, not a local owner. As one recent study put it, the Portland media market is dominated by just a few media firms.

While media consolidation and concentration is the lay of the land, the fact remains that as long as you need a license to broadcast, you must serve the public interest. Although the delivery of broadcast content may have shifted, the mission of the licensee has been constant since 1934: To broadcast in the public interest. Are stations meeting their local obligations? Serving the local public interest? Paraphrasing former FCC Chairman Newton Minow, I invite the owners of the Portland television radio stations to sit down and watch and listen to their stations for a 24 hour period -- watch and license without a spreadsheet, a ratings book, a fundraising proposal, a laptop or other distraction. Pay attention to what matters most to localism: Programming.

What they will observe is a preponderance of network and syndicated programming, an echoing of a monolithic viewpoint, and local news that is becoming ever more dependent on wire services, the sharing of content between sister stations, and a contraction of time devoted to local news. They will also notice a paucity of opportunities for local expression and the