

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER JONATHAN S. ADELSTEIN
APPROVING IN PART AND CONCURRING IN PART**

Re: Broadcast Localism, Notice of Inquiry

From the inception of radio and television broadcasting, they have been unique, distinctly local forms of media. In return for the temporary, exclusive right to use the public airwaves, broadcasters must serve the public interest. The Commission by law must regulate broadcasting with the foremost role of serving the public interest, convenience, and necessity.

Localism is an integral part of serving the public interest. It requires stations to be responsive to the particular needs and interests of their communities. Every community has local news, local elections, local government, local weather, local culture, and local talent. Localism means providing opportunities for local self-expression. It means reaching out, developing and promoting local performing artists, musicians and other talent. It means dedicating the resources to discover and address the unique needs of every segment of the community. It means being alert and notifying the community of crisis situations. It means being accessible, sending reporters and cameras out to all parts of the community to cover not just the problems but the positives as well. It means airing sufficient programming responsive to community needs, and making programming decisions that truly serve and reflect the makeup of the community. It means covering the issues and positions in local elections, not just the horserace. And it means documenting all these efforts in an accessible format so the local community can offer feedback.

While today's action is only a Notice of Inquiry, many of its questions pertain to areas for which more guidance from a thoughtful and discerning public is appropriate. In some areas, however, I believe we are more than ready to move directly to rulemaking proceedings, or to complete pending ones. Today's item recognizes the prompt need to resolve outstanding matters such as the enhanced public file disclosure and children's digital television rulemakings, as well as the Network Affiliated Stations Alliance petition, each pending for more than three years. I trust we will bring those to resolution right away. With the elections nearly upon us, for example, the public file item must be finalized soon to help this cycle. And reaffirming an affiliate's right to reject network programming is critical for preserving and promoting localism. I concur to the extent that today's Notice overlaps with the inquiry already conducted on digital television public interest obligations, for which a rulemaking is long overdue.

But there is much in today's item that is new and appropriate for an inquiry. I am particularly pleased that we address payola and sponsorship identification. I have heard plenty of troubling accounts of new and different forms of undisclosed direct or in-kind payments for access to the public airwaves. Today, we seek specific information to determine what actions the Commission should take to address modern-day pay-for-play practices. This problem is not limited to any single company or any one form. Nor is it simply a radio problem. Increasingly, the television world is blurring the line delineating infomercial and infotainment from genuine news and information. The effects of such undisclosed paid-for programming run deep – for artists and musicians, labor groups, politicians, journalists, researchers, educators, and each and every one of us who listens to the radio or watches television. The public deserves to know who is trying to influence them. The Commission has broad authority to do just that, and, if broadcasters aren't doing it themselves, it's time we stood up to protect the integrity of the public airwaves.

Our inquiry is also properly focused on the nature and extent of disaster warnings, which can be especially crucial for people living in rural media markets with fewer alternative outlets to receive emergency information. And I am pleased that we address ways to promote localism by creating additional broadcast outlets such as low-power FM service.

Given the overarching importance of localism, commenters should offer any and all thoughts on steps the Commission can take to better promote localism and further the public interest. We heard a great deal of input already from the localism hearings held in Charlotte, North Carolina, San Antonio, Texas, and Rapid City, South Dakota. As we strive to find ways to ensure that broadcasters routinely reach out to and serve all segments of their local communities, the Commission hearings have afforded broadcasters a way to receive valuable direct input from concerned citizens. But we need to understand the types of interactions and outreach that occur regularly between broadcasters and community representatives in each of our cities and towns.

Our country's system of local broadcasting stands as one of our greatest achievements and should be cherished. Broadcasters who serve their communities exceptionally well should be proud of their efforts. As other types of media increasingly try to emulate the touch and feel of broadcast localism, the Commission must do its part to ensure that all broadcast licensees exhibit the deep and unwavering commitment to their local communities that the public should be able to expect from its trustees.