

**Comments by
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**FCC FUTURE OF MEDIA WORKSHOP:
“PUBLIC AND OTHER NONCOMMERCIAL MEDIA IN THE DIGITAL ERA”**

**Friday, April 30, 2010 / 9:00 a.m.
FCC Commission Meeting Room TW-C305
445 12th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C.**

My name is Jose Louis Rodriguez and I am the founder and CEO of the Hispanic Information Telecommunications Network or HITN.

I thank the Commission and staff for hosting today’s workshop and for giving HITN an opportunity to testify. The issues covered in today’s workshop are important and profound. I congratulate the organizers of the workshop for asking all the right questions. It is an honor to share the panel with such a distinguished group.

HITN is America’s oldest and only Spanish language non-profit public interest educational television network. We were established in 1983 to use technologies to serve America’s growing Hispanic community to educate, enlighten and empower Spanish speaking families with engaging programming.

Filling a Gap

HITN fills a critical gap in the media landscape. Our network is one of the few if not only non-profit networks that provides educational and instructional programming which is needed and sought by the Latino community. Having HITN in your home gives you access to some of the tools needed to achieve the American dream. We provide English as a Second Language programs which help viewers learn English. We offer televised GED courses which prepare Spanish speaking viewers to take and pass high school equivalency exams.

Our public affairs programming like Destination Casa Blanca and Insight New York analyze current events in English with a Latin flavor. Our call-in shows like Diálogo de Costa a Costa give viewers a regular two way conversation on issues, government programs, and news you can use. We also offer practical advice to viewers through programs like College Admissions 411 and Immigration 411. We also cover the events of Latino organizations like the Hispanic Congressional Caucus, the National Association of Hispanic State Legislators and several Latino service organizations. We also offer access to news and information from a pan-Hispanic vantage point.

Currently HITN reaches approx. 35 million households and can be viewed nationally on DirecTV; Dish Network; AT&T U-verse and Verizon FiOS as well as on cable systems in select markets including Time Warner Cable (NY, NJ, and TX); Charter (CA, NV, WA, and GA); and Comcast (IL, CO).

New Media

A lot has changed since 1983 and HITN is much more than a TV network. We are the largest single holder of EBS spectrum and are working with Clearwire and Sprint to expand the reach of educational outreach through 4-G broadband services, we were early participants in the e-rate program in Puerto Rico delivering internet access via satellite and have adopted a multi-platform approach to content and are using social networking tools to reach, serve and create community among our viewers, guests, partners and users.

I am particularly proud of one of our most exciting innovations, known as CBOs Connect; an initiative to connect, give voice and promote learning among Community Based Organizations and their members, in schools, libraries and grassroots groups. We are able to link them into a virtual learning environment. The project stimulates collaboration and provides a platform for CBOs to serve their community and offer programs that address a variety of social, economic, educational and health needs in the Latino community.

By combining video with a distributed classroom experience we can foster lifelong learning in partnership with community based organizations and enable young and older students to earn certifications, continuing education credits, GEDs and other educational credentials to move up the economic ladder as well as improve program delivery within and among CBOs. We were proud to work with the FCC on an early test of the CBOs Connect model in the DTV transition where we helped over 28,000 Latino families learn about the transition to digital television.

Video Distribution for Non-profits

It is so important that the FCC focus on the non-profit sector, especially broadcasters like HITN which are outside the current club of PBS stations. Non-profit sources of news, information and educational programming are more important than ever as the media eco-system in both the public and private sector continues to consolidate and expand through brand extensions.

It is Congressional and FCC policy which makes it possible for HITN to be here today. The public interest set-aside policy for DBS television gave HITN-TV the opportunity to reach a base audience and allowed the network to grow into cable, telco, internet and mobile platforms. Yet, the terms of DBS public interest carriage are difficult and tenuous. In contrast to commercial and PBS carriage agreements, DBS public interest channels do not get long term carriage agreements.

In the world of cable, even when we have an agreement with a major cable provider, we only have a “hunting license” which gives us the right to seek carriage from local managers. While the large public and private media providers are able to leverage their position to squeeze new channels onto cable systems, and cable owned content has little trouble being carried, independent, non-profit networks like HITN hear a familiar refrain from local cable managers that there is ‘no room at the inn’ for our specialized network.

When we do secure carriage on a cable system, we are often segregated into what I call the “digital ghetto” where a viewer needs to subscribe to a premium digital service to gain access to our educational programming.

One of the more positive developments in recent years for our network has been carriage on Telco video systems like Verizon FiOS and AT&T U-verse, where a national cable agreement gives true national distribution. But much more needs to be done.

We know we are only reaching a fraction of the audience that wants and needs our programming. Carriage for small networks is one of the most important issues that the FCC should address. We have suggested that the Commission consider creating a national public interest tier for non-profit educational networks like HITN for cable platforms, especially when the Commission is asked to approve a merger or consolidation. PEG channels are localized and limited in reach. What is needed is national distribution like C-SPAN, the cable owned Congressional channel.

Financial Resources/Partnership with CPB & PBS

HITN has also survived in a very difficult media environment thanks to another important policy decision of Congress and the FCC, namely the decision to make EBS spectrum available to non-profit educational entities. We are not only in the process of launching much needed wireless services in communities where our commercial partners are deploying 4-G networks, the revenues we have derived from spectrum leases have been the financial lifeblood of our non-profit.

Networks like HITN should be fully eligible for CPB funding and should be welcomed into the Public Broadcasting family. Since the earliest days of HITN, I have aggressively sought new and innovative partnerships with PBS stations and continue to seek to partnerships. Not being a holder of a broadcast license has proven to be a barrier to our network in the CPB/PBS universe.

I would encourage policy-makers and public television executives to take a fresh approach to the opportunities that exist for partnership with our network. HITN, for example, could immediately provide Spanish language educational programming to public broadcasters for their newly available digital channels. Instead of partnering and leveraging our existing resources, a number of PBS stations have partnered with a for-profit entity which was recently sold to a Media conglomerate from Spain. Whether that meets the letter and spirit of public interest broadcasting is an issue presently before the Commission. That said; I welcome the opportunity to be part of

the PBS family and believe our non-profit offers programming in the true spirit of educational television.

The Future

As America's only U.S. Hispanic controlled non-profit educational network we deliver information which is highly desired by our community. We also take an approach to broadcasting which is different from any of our peers. We see HITN as a platform for communication and dialogue. We know from our viewers through our call-in shows, when we cover events of Latino organizations and in the future through our CBOs connect broadband project. We see our role as not just pushing programming out to the community but also breathing in the interests, ideas and concerns of our community.

Carriage, funding and red tape are significant obstacles for HITN. By creating a national public interest tier for independent non-profit educational networks and opening CPB support to programmers like HITN that do not hold broadcast licenses will help. The FCC should also give consideration to the limited resources of many of us who come to the FCC in formal proceedings. HITN, for example has an appeal of a Universal Service Program / E-Rate case that is years old pending before the Commission, a petition related to the eligibility of a for-profit entity to gain a DBS public interest channel has been before the Commission for years.

HITN has sought a public interest or minority radio channel from the merged Sirius-XM. The Commission must realize that when a small entity has to deal with the Commission resources and time are especially precious.

DTV transition provides an exciting opportunity to give new and minority voices a chance to be carried on under-utilized digital channels. Rather than auction those channels, the Commission should look at ways that they could be made available to non-profit educational broadcasters.

The fundamental question for the FCC is whether there is any place for small, minority or emerging networks in a rapidly consolidating media eco-system. The internet is not close to being a perfect substitute for television or radio. Brand extension, whether from corporate media or PBS stations does not produce media diversity.

Non-profit broadcasters can offer additional voices and serve the public interest. Non-profit broadcasters like HITN can serve those Americans left behind by the quest for larger audiences by the media giants. We need a chance to survive and co-exist with the giants. HITN looks forward to continuing this discussion and with the FCC's leadership making these recommendations a reality.

I thank the Commission for the opportunity to testify and look forward to the discussion and your questions.