Statement of Barbara S. Cochran President Emeritus, Radio Television Digital News Association FCC Future of Media Workshop March 4, 2010

Thank you for inviting me to speak at this workshop on behalf of the journalists working in local radio and television stations across the country. These journalists are members of the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA), the world's largest organization of journalists working in electronic media.

Broadcast news plays a critical role in keeping Americans informed. Local television news holds the top spot as the number one source of news for Americans. Just this week, Tom Rosenstiel and his colleagues at the Pew Research Center reported that Americans say local television news is their top source of news, cited by 78 percent as a news source they use regularly.

The secret of that success is localism. Local television and radio stations give viewers and listeners the important information they need to live their daily lives in the communities they call home. It's news, but it's also weather and sports. It's a commitment to going on the air and staying on the air in emergencies. It's the people who present the news, who are seen as approachable neighbors and friends. And, as I will explain in a few minutes, the digital revolution is allowing these popular purveyors of local news to drill down deeper and extend coverage wider to create hyperlocal news centers that will serve their communities even better.

Local stations are producing more news than ever on more platforms than ever. The number of hours of television news on local stations has grown continuously over the past two decades, averaging 3.4 hours a day until the recession of 2001-2. The growth resumed in 2003 and has continued to an all-time high of 4.6 hours a day in RTDNA's most recent survey in 2008. In that year, three times as many stations added news programming as cut news programming. And for the next year, six times as many say they will add news as those who will cut news.

The number of television stations offering news stayed relatively stable until the 1990s when more Fox affiliate stations began offering news and the Spanish-language stations of Univision, Telemundo and Telefutura started local newscasts. RTDNA research shows the number of television stations offering news peaked in 2007-8 at 769 with another 203 stations presenting news produced by another station. Today, there are 759 stations originating news and an additional 207 stations carrying news from another local source, slightly off the peak number.

Until recently, radio and television newsrooms focused on hourly newscasts or nightly news programs delivered over the air. Now they also provide news online, on digital subchannels and on mobile platforms. Radio stations are producing video as well as streaming audio that can be accessed through the Internet. Television stations are

providing video updates for news consumers on their Iphones and Blackberries when and where they want them.

But the landscape for local radio and television is also challenging. Declines in advertising revenue and increasing competition for the attention of viewers and listeners are putting financial pressures on commercial stations. Last year's recession affected broadcast stations just as it affected so many other parts of the economy. So while stations are producing more news than ever, they are doing it with less. RTDNA's surveys show that newsroom staffing has declined in the past two years and the average salary is dropping. The average newsroom staff was 35.9 people in 2008-9 compared with 37 eight years ago.

Nonetheless, stations continue to serve their communities with news that informs and enlightens, promotes civic engagement, rallies support for the unfortunate and safeguards lives in time of disaster. A familiar example here in Washington is last month's news coverage of two major snowstorms. Local stations kept viewers and listeners apprised of weather and road conditions, closings and safety tips.

Area hospitals asked broadcasters to spread the word that four-wheel drive vehicles were needed to transports patients for dialysis. Journalists did so and countless lives were saved. At the request of local fire departments, local broadcasters urged snowbound residents to remove snow from around fire hydrants so that fire fighters would not have to delay responding to a fire while they uncovered hydrants. And if you were one of the thousands who were without electric power for several hours or days, you could still keep informed with your battery operated radio, thanks to all news station WTOP.

Broadcasters have not, however, touted the financial burdens of this extensive coverage. During the blizzards, radio and television stations often had to preempt local or national advertisements so that they could quickly disseminate critical information. While most area residents were homebound, broadcasters' employees worked around the clock, many braving freezing temperatures and miserable conditions, to provide continuous coverage of the unusual event. Broadcasters had to house, feed, and pay employees' overtime for a one-week period. And they did so -- to serve their local communities.

From snowstorms in Washington and New York, from California wildfires to the shootings at Ft. Hood, Texas, from the bridge collapse in the Twin Cities to Hurricane Katrina, local broadcasters keep their communities informed and secure.

This public service is not limited to times of disaster. Stations serve as watchdogs on behalf of their communities, providing enterprise and investigative reporting that helps citizens keep tabs on local government and other institutions. While some fear that investigative reporting is dying out at local stations, the evidence suggests otherwise. RTDNA finds plenty of competition each year for the Edward R. Murrow Awards it presents at the local and network levels. And just this year, local stations received twice as many of the prestigious DuPont-Columbia Awards as in the previous year and nearly tied the all-time high from four years earlier.

To continue to provide high quality news for their communities at a time when revenues are falling, station newsrooms are restructuring and retooling to work more efficiently. By taking advantage of digital technology, newsrooms are increasing their editorial capacity. Hearst Broadcasting is calling its journalists APJ's, for all platform journalists. Digital tools are democratizing the newsroom. Everyone in the newsroom can have a beat. By changing two-person crews to one person with digital equipment, Scripps TV stations have doubled the number of people on the street and inaugurated more intense coverage in targeted areas. Stations can now provide the kind of granular coverage that used to be available only from suburban newspapers.

Here are a few more examples of how stations are using digital technology to innovate:

- Many stations are creating hyperlocal sites for neighborhoods. KOMO-TV in Seattle has built 50 hyperlocal web sites so far. http://komonews.com/communities KNXV in Phoenix provides zoned coverage for six distinct regions. http://www.abc15.com/news/default.aspx WFTS in Tampa http://www.abcactionnews.com/content/news/local/default.aspx and WPTV in Palm Beach http://www.wptv.com/news/default.aspx provide targeted coverage for 8 separate counties.
- Stations are using digital technology to build a new connection with viewers and listeners. WBZ-TV in Boston has created a web site called, "Declare Your Curiosity." http://www.declareyourcuriosity.com/ People send in their questions and the station produces a story for its newscast that provides the answer. Recent topics range from violence in video games to the cost of college tuition to routes for Boston snow plows.
- Stations are extending their investigative reporting by creating searchable databases on their websites. WCMH-TV in Columbus, Ohio, created databases on Columbus burglaries, Ohio stimulus requests, state liens, and 18 other topics. nbc4i.com WPTV in Palm Beach has a searchable "Restaurant Report," http://www.wptv.com/content/restaurants/inspections/default.aspx based on government inspection reports. This is an important act of journalism for the community that could not be accomplished in the same way on television.
- Stations are using Google maps to show where news is happening. WJBF in Augusta, GA, is just one example http://www2.wjbf.com/ and shows this can be done in a small market.
- LiveNewsCameras.com LiveNewsCameras.com is a web site created by station WFLD-TV in Chicago that aggregates streaming feeds of live coverage and displays a half dozen at any time. This resource, displaying at times a half dozen or more different live streams during major breaking news events (such as recent hurricanes) and giving viewers dozens of different angles and options during

scheduled events like the Inauguration of the President, has proven popular with an international audience.

- Stations are investing in user-enabling technology. Scripps employs interactive
 weather http://www.newsnet5.com/subindex/weather and traffic technology
 http://www.newsnet5.com/subindex/traffic on all of its stations' websites that
 allow users to take control of their own experience. Local stations in Washington,
 DC, collected viewer video and other information during the snowstorms and
 featured this material on their web site and on air.
 http://www.myfoxdc.com/subindex/video/viewercams
- Radio stations are extending their reach through the Internet by incorporating video and text as well as audio into their web sites. WAKR-AM in Akron, Ohio, http://www.akronnewsnow.com/news/wakrnewsnow.asp provides news, traffic and weather in a 24/7 audio stream the equivalent of an all news radio station -- and a daily VODcast for a city of 250,000 that doesn't even have its own television station. WTOP in Washington DC created an Internet-only radio station focusing on news for federal government workers. http://www.federalnewsradio.com/ The station proved so popular it is now broadcast on the AM frequency.

These examples are just a sampling of the ways in which local television and radio stations are using digital media to create innovations that serve the public.

All that I've said this afternoon leads to the inevitable conclusion that the vast majority of America's radio and television stations are meeting their public interest obligations by using the spectrum allocated to them to the great benefit of their listeners and viewers. In fact, I think it fair to say that broadcasters embrace the charge to serve their local communities, and have done so in spectacular fashion even in the wake of deregulation. Locally-targeted programming, particularly news and information programming, is the primary means through which radio and television stations distinguish themselves in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Those radio and television licensees who prosper not only serve their communities, but also are an integral part of them.

The stated objective of the Commission's Future of Media proceeding is "to assess whether all Americans have access to vibrant, diverse sources of news and information that will enable them to enrich their lives, their communities and our democracy." I am confident that when this project culminates in its report, the Commission will find that local broadcasters remain an integral part of our country's news and information fiber.

At the same time, RTDNA cautions the Commission, as it embarks upon this initiative, to be true to its commitment not to run afoul of its obligation under the First Amendment to protect free speech and an independent press. Any regulation that touches upon the content of broadcast news or intrudes into broadcast newsrooms is perilous for our democracy, rife with the potential for unintended consequences and, in the context of

today's discussion, wholly unnecessary. As a practical matter, additional regulation will not further the goals the Commission seeks to achieve, but will turn its efforts upside down by draining station resources and forcing broadcasters to base editorial decisions on the government's private notions of what the public ought to hear rather than the desires of the audiences broadcasters are licensed to serve. Moreover, radio and television stations compete with a plethora of traditional and new media information platforms unencumbered by regulation. Government policy should be designed to foster competition, not to unfairly handicap certain marketplace participants.

Television and radio stations are succeeding because they are maintaining their commitment to public service and innovating to keep that public service relevant. Now is not the time to impose new burdens and regulatory regimes that could stifle competition, inhibit innovation and damage the public service mission broadcasters have embraced for more than three-quarters of a century.