

FCC: Issues: Digital Television and Public Interest Obligations

Written by Emmy

Tuesday, 15 June 2010 22:40 - Last Updated Wednesday, 16 June 2010 01:33

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Public Interest, Public Airwaves Coalition Proposes Public Interest Processing Guidelines

A coalition consisting of the Alliance for Better Campaigns (now the Media Policy Program of the Campaign Legal Center), Benton Foundation, Center for Creative Voices in Media, Center for Digital Democracy, Common Cause, Institute for Public Representation of Georgetown University Law Center, Media Access Project, New America Foundation, and Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ, Inc. are calling on the Federal Communications Commission to define meaningful public interest requirements so that the grant of digital spectrum will benefit not only broadcasters, but also our national and local communities.

[Click here to read the proposal in its entirety.](#)

New Study Outlines Deficient Government Coverage by Broadcasters; Reformers Urge FCC to Act

June 12, 2007 -- An alliance of Midwest civic and political reform groups is calling on the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to impose stronger public interest obligations on local television broadcasters as part of the new regulatory framework that will govern the pending transition from analog to digital broadcasting.

To view the full release, [click here.](#)

Groups Urge FCC to Vote Against Expanded Must Carry Rules

April 23, 2007 -- The Campaign Legal Center and Common Cause sent a letter to FCC Commissioners urging them to vote against expanded must carry rules until the FCC has finalized public interest obligations for digital broadcasters.

To read the full letter, [click here.](#)

Public Benefit Still Missing From Digital TV Transition

Mar. 27, 2007 -- The Campaign Legal Center, the Benton Foundation and the Center for American Progress called on Congress and the FCC to require more than lip service from

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broadcasters on their obligations to the public. In a letter delivered to House Commerce and Energy Committee Chairman John Dingell (D-MI) and Telecommunications and the Internet Subcommittee Chairman Edward Markey (D-MA) the organizations detailed the outstanding issues and unfinished business raised in Federal Communications Commission proceedings concerning the transition to digital television. The Subcommittee holds a hearing on the Status of the Digital Television Transition, which is to be completed in less than 700 days, on Wednesday morning.

Last month, during a FCC oversight hearing held by the same subcommittee, FCC Chairman Kevin Martin, responding to questions from Subcommittee Chairman Markey, suggested that the Commission has already addressed a number of questions raised in a 1999 Notice of Inquiry on possible new public interest obligations for digital television stations, noting an extension of analog public interest obligations to digital TV.

In their letter, Legal Center Policy Director Meredith McGehee and Benton Chairman Charles Benton point out that since 1995, the Commission has realized that the greater capabilities afforded by digital technology could affect broadcasters' obligations to serve the public interest and asked for public comment on how those obligations might be adapted to the digital context.

In addition, an open proceeding launched in 1999 still has not addressed the obligations of broadcasters to disclose their public interest activities, enhance political discourse, enhance access to the media by all people, and meet minimum public interest obligations for the digital age.

To read the full letter, [click here](#).

House Subcommittee Asked to Demand Answers from FCC at Oversight Hearing: Letter from Benton Foundation and Campaign Legal Center

Feb. 9, 2007 -- Members of the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet are being urged to demand answers from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regarding the lack of digital public interest obligations more than a decade after the process began.

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To read the full letter, [click here](#).

Senate Committee Urged to Call Out FCC on Public Interest Obligations: Letter from Meredith McGehee, Campaign Legal Center Policy Director

January 31, 2007 -- With the Federal Communications Commissioners scheduled to testify before the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, the Campaign Legal Center sent a letter asking the Senate Committee members to demand answers for the Commission's continued failure to implement digital public interest obligations after six years. All five Commissioners are scheduled to appear before the full Committee on Thursday, February 1 at 10 a.m. in Room 253 of the Senate Russell Office Building.

To read the letter, [click here](#).

FCC Commissioners Adelstein and Copps Recognize Transition Shortcomings: Statement of Meredith McGehee, Campaign Legal Center Policy Director

Sept. 29, 2006 -- Federal Communications Commissioners Jonathan Adelstein and Michael Copps deserve credit for calling out their colleagues and pushing for new public-interest obligations for digital broadcasters. This process has been stalled for nearly seven years and the FCC has still not defined the public-interest duties, creating confusion for both broadcasters and the viewing public. Not only will clear public-interest obligations promise relevant and quality programming for viewers, but well-defined obligations will create greater certainty for broadcasters as they chart courses for programming in the digital world.

To read the full statement, [click here](#).

Groups Send Letter to the FCC and Commerce Committees on Multicasting Must-Carry

June 6, 2006 -- The Campaign Legal Center, along with the Benton Foundation, Common Cause, Media Access Project, New American Foundation, and the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ, Inc. sent the following letter to the Federal Communications Commission, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation and the House Committee on Energy and Commerce regarding their upcoming public hearing on multicasting

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must-carry rules.

[Click here to read the letter.](#)

Statement of Meredith McGehee on the Upcoming FCC Action on Digital Multicast Must-Carry

June 1, 2006 -- "The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) should put the American people first, and issue meaningful and effective public interest obligations for digital television broadcasters before moving forward with a decision on multicast must-carry regulations. Chairman Kevin Martin has announced that the Commission will vote on must-carry rules at its public meeting scheduled for June 15. In the interest of the public which it serves, the FCC should complete its stalled public interest rulemaking for broadcasters by establishing minimum requirements for substantive civic or electoral programming and set clear standards and definitions for meeting those obligations to the public.."

[Click here to read the complete statement.](#)

McGehee Calls On FCC To Define Public Interest Obligations Of Digital Broadcasters

May 22, 2006 -- Policy Director Meredith McGehee sent a letter to FCC Chairman Kevin Martin calling on him and the rest of the Commission to define public interest obligations for digital broadcasters. The FCC has yet to mandate how broadcasters will serve the public after television broadcasting transitions from analog to digital.

[Click here to read the Legal Center's press release.](#)

[Click here to read the letter.](#)

CLC: FCC Must Define Public Interest Obligations for Digital TV

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January 18, 2006 -- The Campaign Legal Center along with the Benton Foundation, Common Cause, New America Foundation and Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ, Inc. sent a letter to FCC Chairman Martin urging him to move forward in defining public interest obligations for digital television. The groups urge that this is a particularly important issue given the recent congressional action of establishing a 2009 deadline for the digital transition.

The letter states: "We urge you to seize upon this opportunity and accelerate the benefits that consumers receive from digital television by moving swiftly forward on these proceedings and clearly defining the public service that viewers can expect from local broadcasters."

[Click here to read the full letter.](#)

DTV-AGE Bill Introduced in House; Would Strengthen Broadcasters' Public Interest Obligations

Representative Diane Watson introduced a bill today, May 12, 2005, to strengthen the public interest standard for broadcasters as they transition from analog to digital spectrum. The bill, titled the Digital Television Accountability and Governance Enhancement Act (or "DTV-AGE") would mandate three hours per week per digital channel of local civic affairs or electoral affairs programming, children's educational programming, as well as a minimum amount of independent or locally produced programming.

[Read the full text of the bill.](#)

Public Interest Advocates Launch 'Media Watchdog Project'

The Alliance for Better Campaigns today, September 21, 2004, launched its "Media Watchdog Project," a campaign to encourage citizens to monitor their local stations and call on broadcasters to devote more time to candidate and issue discussion - particularly at the state and local level. Over the next six weeks, citizens will watch and score local news coverage of elections on a variety of factors - including coverage of state and local races, the amount of issue discussion vs. strategy or horserace coverage, and the number of candidate soundbites. After completing the scorecard, citizens have an opportunity to send customized feedback to station managers and news directors via email.

FCC Commissioners Remark on Political Broadcasting at the Public Interest, Public Airwaves Coalition Event

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FCC Commissioners Michael Copps and Jonathan Adelstein spoke at the Public Interest Public Airwaves (PIPA) launch of their campaign to "encourage local citizens to hold their communities' broadcasters to a higher standard of public service, particularly when it comes to election coverage" in Washington, DC on July 19, 2004.

[Click here to view Commissioner Copps' remarks.](#)

[Click here to view Commissioner Adelstein's remarks.](#)

[Click here for Alliance for Better Campaigns' press release on the event.](#)

Public Interest Groups Urge FCC Chairman Michael Powell to Move on an NPRM to Define Meaningful Public Interest Obligations

The Campaign Legal Center along with leaders of the *Public Interest, Public Airwaves Coalition*, wrote a letter to FCC Chairman, Michael Powell, strongly urging him to move forward on a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to define meaningful public interest obligations for television broadcast licensees.

[Click here to view the letter in its entirety.](#)

Senator McCain and Chairman Powell Challenge Broadcasters

On June 15, 2004, Senator John McCain and Chairman of the Federal Communications Committee, Michael Powell, sent a letter to major broadcasters in the country calling for an increase in election news coverage and public affairs programming. The letter was sent to Peter Chernin of News Corporation, Edward Fritts of the National Association Broadcasters, Robert Iger of the Walt Disney Company, Leslie Moonves of Viacom, and Bob Wright of NBC.

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[Click here to view the letter.](#)

Click here to view broadcasting groups who have dedicated more free air time.

Former FCC Officials Request Rulemaking on Free Air Time

Former FCC Chairman Newton Minow and former FCC General Counsel Henry Geller filed a petition asking the FCC to launch an expedited rulemaking to require free time this fall for candidates in campaigns for local and regional offices. Their proposal calls for 20 minutes/day in the 30 days prior to a general election. "Putting profits second and public service first can and should be required [of broadcasters] to make a reasonable contribution to an informed local electorate," Mr Minow and Mr Geller wrote.

[Click here to view the Former FCC Chairman Newton Minow's and former FCC General Counsel Henry Geller's petition to the FCC.](#)

Click here to view the *Communications Daily* article, "Minow, Geller Seek Expedited FCC Rulemaking on Free Time."

FCC Should Challenge Broadcasters & Cable Entities to Boost Coverage of Political Discourse

The Legal Center is urging the FCC to issue a formal challenge to broadcasters and cable systems to increase coverage of campaign and election issues.

The amount of broadcast news coverage of campaign and election issues has continued to decline, particularly in recent years. For example, the average nightly national network television coverage dropped 71.6 % from 1994 to 2002, and the network evening news coverage of the presidential campaigns dropped 33% from 1996 to 2000.

[Click to read the Legal Center's Nov. 2003 press release regarding the FCC challenge.](#)

[Click here to read the CableFAX Daily article, "Non Profit Wants Cable to Step Up Campaign Coverage."](#)

Notice of Inquiry in the Matter of Public Interest Obligations of TV Broadcast Licensees

The nation is in the process of converting television broadcasting from analog to digital technology to maximize efficiencies in the broadcast spectrum. Congress and the FCC have expressed intent that digital broadcasters meet public interest obligations, which include obligations associated with political broadcasting, throughout and after the conversion to digital technology. In an effort to analyze relevant factors and craft workable regulations, the FCC has launched several rulemaking proceedings related to the digital conversion. The FCC specifically requested comment relating to political discourse in a Notice of Inquiry (NOI) in December of 1999 and later requested updated comment on the same NOI in a related review proceeding in January of 2003.

The 1999 NOI recognized the importance of television broadcasting to political campaigns and discourse and requested comment on candidate access, segregating candidate programming to specific program streams, mandating certain amounts of political programming, and disclosure of political programming and advertisements.

[Click here to view the NOI, In the Matter of Public Interest Obligations of TV Broadcast Licensees, MM 99-360, Rel. Dec. 20, 1999, in its entirety.](#)

Advisory Committee (Gore Commission) Report

By Executive Order, President Clinton established the Advisory Committee on Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters (PIAC). The Committee studied and recommended the public interest responsibilities that should accompany the broadcasters' receipt of digital television licenses. NTIA serves as the Secretariat for the Advisory Committee. The President selected 22 members from the broadcasting industry, public interest community, computer industry, academia, and labor community. Members were appointed for the duration of the Committee, which presented its report to Vice President Gore on October 1, 1998 and terminated before October 31, 1998 .

[Click here to view the report, "Charting the Digital Broadcasting Future", in its entirety.](#)
