



April 4, 2013

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The upcoming departures of Chairman Julius Genachowski and Commissioner Robert McDowell from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) present you with a golden opportunity to achieve significant media and communications policy reforms left unfinished during your first term. We, the undersigned organizations, strongly urge you to nominate a new FCC Chair and Commissioner who will be deeply committed to protecting the public interest by increasing competition, improving political transparency, promoting media diversity and accessibility, and ensuring an open Internet.

Our nation's media and communications policies have a pervasive effect on life in 21st century America. Those policies shape our commercial markets, our political discourse, our educational opportunities, and our social interactions. Decisions at the FCC impact everything from what viewers see on their televisions to the content they can access on the Internet and the rates they pay. These will be crucial appointments for your second term.

In the Senate and in your first presidential campaign, you clearly voiced your opposition to further media industry consolidation. You spoke forcefully on this subject in 2007, saying, "I believe that the nation's media ownership rules remain necessary and are critical to the public interest. We should be doing much more to encourage diversity in the ownership of broadcast media, promote the development of new media outlets for expression of diverse viewpoints, and establish greater clarity in the public interest obligations of broadcasters occupying the nation's spectrum."

That same year, you, along with Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL) wrote, "[B]roadcast ownership rules directly implicate core American values such as diversity, localism, representation, and a competitive marketplace of ideas." You also noted that there had been no improvement in the level of minority ownership and that the number of African-American-owned stations had fallen 30 percent since 1998. Today, racial minorities operate just 2.2% of full-power commercial television stations.

In your first term, you and your administration took on many important national media and communications policy priorities. For example, you endeavored to implement the forward-looking provisions of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act. Yet, there remains much to do.

The FCC must review all telecommunications and media mergers critically. It must adhere to specific public interest guidelines in these reviews to ensure that the people's airwaves actually serve the people. It must recommit to enforcing rules already on the books, such as the media ownership rules, as well as political advertising transparency mandates that Congress enacted under Section 317 of the Telecommunications Act to ensure that viewers know who is paying to persuade them on issues of national importance. The FCC should empower parents to make good decisions with the right tools to monitor the media consumed by their children. Moreover, the critical information needs of many communities, including people who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or visually impaired, remain underserved.

The FCC must confront challenges for broadband access and openness as well. Your new FCC appointees will need to deal with industry's unfounded deregulatory pleas, and its calls to wipe away decades of hard-fought universal service requirements and consumer protections. Petitions calling for fundamental changes to these rules are particularly off-base because broadband prices continue to increase while competition declines and millions of Americans lack access to critical 21st century infrastructure.

The FCC's 2010 Open Internet Order also faces legal challenges that could undermine the FCC's authority over the nation's telecommunications infrastructure. These rules were based on principles that you have long supported, as you pledged to "preserve the freedom and openness that have allowed the Internet to become a transformative and powerful platform for speech and expression," and to "remain vigilant and see to it that innovation is allowed to flourish, that consumers are protected from abuse, and that the democratic spirit of the Internet remains intact."

As a senator, candidate, and recently as president, you have supported increasing universal and affordable broadband access, preserving open Internet policies, promoting open and shared spectrum use, and empowering consumers to "unlock" and use their mobile devices. To achieve those goals, the Commission must seize this opportunity to chart a new course for the FCC – one that will prioritize the public interest over corporate interests.

We strongly urge you to nominate a new FCC Chair and new Commissioner who are committed to faithfully implementing the media policies you have championed during your career in public service.

Sincerely,

Access Humboldt
Alternate ROOTS
American Council of the Blind (ACB)
American Foundation for the Blind (AFB)
Association of Late Deafened Adults (ALDA)
Art IS Change
Benton Foundation
California Coalition of Agencies Serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CCASDHH)
Center for Media Justice (CMJ)
Cerebral Palsy and Deaf Organization (CPADO)
Chicago Media Action
Common Cause
Common Frequency
Consumers Union
Children Now
Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumer Advocacy Network (DHHCAN)
Fight for the Future
Free Press Action Fund
Global Action Project (GAP)
Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA)
Highlander Research and Education Center
Institute for Local Self-Reliance
May First/People Link
Media Action Center
Media Action Grassroots Network
Main Street Project
Media Alliance
Media Literacy Project
Media Mobilizing Project
Media Policy Initiative
Mountain Area Information Network (MAIN)
National Association of the Deaf (NAD)
National Association of Broadcast Employees & Technicians (NABET-CWA)
National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC)
Native Public Media
New York Tech Meetup
Open Technology Institute
Personal Democracy Media
Public Knowledge
Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Inc. (TDI)
The Newspaper Guild-Communications Workers of America (TNG-CWA)
Ting/Hover
Tribal Digital Village Network
Tucows, Inc

United Church of Christ, Office of Communication, Inc .(UCC OC)
William C. Velasquez Institute (WCVI)
Young People's Project