

Statement of James M. Keelor
Before the Federal Communications Commission
Localism Task Force
October 22, 2003

Good evening, Mr. Chairman and Commissioners, my name is Jim Keelor. I am President and COO of Liberty Corporation, which is headquartered in Greenville, South Carolina.

Liberty owns 15 television stations in the South and Midwest, in markets ranging from number 50 to number 180. Here in North Carolina, Liberty has WWAY in Wilmington, and in South Carolina, we own WIS in Columbia.

I started out in broadcasting over 36 years ago as a local reporter, so I feel like I have seen the industry from the ground up, and that's why I'm grateful for this chance to share with you some of the remarkable efforts of television stations to serve the interests of our local communities.

Shortly after beginning work at one of our stations, every new Liberty employee receives a letter from me welcoming them to the company. This letter begins: "We (here at Liberty) are very serious about our commitment to the communities we serve." And while there are far too many examples of this commitment to describe here, I would like to mention just a couple of our stations' efforts.

First, as you know, the Carolinas have an unfortunate history of hurricanes and other severe weather, and over the years, both WWAY and WIS have dedicated thousands of hours to covering storms, including Hurricane Isabel. Liberty has invested millions of dollars in state-of-the-art weather tracking equipment, multiple live news trucks for both stations, and other equipment, all of which allows the stations to broadcast localized emergency warnings and report on local

community recovery efforts. We have organized fund raisers to help the families who were victims of these storms.

Liberty's stations also devote a substantial amount of free airtime to covering local politics. WWAY and the North Carolina Broadcasters Association have a 25-year history of producing debates among statewide political candidates, and WIS produced and aired live debates before both the primary and general elections for Governor in 2002. Also, in the weeks leading up to the general election, WIS aired live interviews during its top-rated evening newscast with 18 candidates for federal and statewide offices, and profiles of 8 different key issues in the races for U.S. Senate and Governor, all at no cost to the candidates.

Our stations also recognize their special place in the community as a source of local culture and education. For example, WWAY led the way in updating the public on the progress of the new Cameron Art Museum in Wilmington, and heavily promoted the Museum's grand opening, including the free production of a 30-minute news special on the Museum that aired just prior the Museum's opening. WIS, for its part, recently launched a terrific new program called "A Class Act," which helps teachers in South Carolina equip their classrooms with needed supplies in the face of government cuts in education funds.

Commissioners, it is important for you to understand that Liberty is not unique in its commitment to localism. This is what broadcasters must strive to do. Local television stations know that, given their unique place in the community, it is important for them to be good corporate citizens.

But we also know that, in this era of six nationwide TV networks, 80 cable channels, high-speed Internet, and all the other sources of information out there, we have to differentiate ourselves if we're going to be able to attract and hold the attention of our viewers. And the best

way to do that is to be closely involved in our communities, and responsive to the concerns of our local audience. That is something the people who run Liberty Corporation learned a long time ago, and it is the main reason that we have been able to survive and flourish as a group of stations located in small markets for so many years.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I'd be happy to answer any questions you or anyone in the audience may have.