

The FCC “Tunes In” to Rapid City
By Federal Communications Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein

The Federal Communications Commission is coming to Rapid City. We are seeking your input on how local television and radio broadcasters are serving communities in the Black Hills.

Last summer, the FCC heard a groundswell of public concern about how the growth of giant media companies has undercut the coverage of issues of concern in local communities. Nearly 3 million people contacted the FCC and Congress about rules that shape the ownership of our nation’s media. I’ve personally listened to thousands of people in city halls, schools, churches and meeting rooms across the country.

Now it’s your turn. The FCC is doing an in-depth examination of how it can improve broadcasters’ service to their local communities, and we need your input.

We want to hear directly about your experience with TV and radio. We want your perspective on how well broadcasters are meeting the needs of your community. Are they providing sufficient coverage of issues of local concern and local elections? Do you have enough different news sources? Are broadcasters providing sufficient family-friendly programming? Are you hearing local artists played on the radio?

I grew up here in Rapid City and I know personally the dedication of many in our local media to provide the best service to our area. A dedicated and responsive media is one of the most important ways to ensure a first rate economy, education, and quality of life for South Dakotans.

I’m proud to hold this historic hearing in my home town. The Rapid City event is the third of only six official hearings held across the country. Since it is the smallest community we are visiting, it will serve as a case study of what is happening in hundreds of communities across the country the FCC will not have the opportunity to visit.

So we want to hear about the positive aspects of what’s happening in the local media, as well as those issues that need more work. We need to hear from you so that we at the FCC can make informed policy decisions that could dramatically affect the future of what you see, hear, and read here in the Black Hills and across the nation.

Broadcast radio and television are unique, distinctly local forms of media. They are licensed to local communities and by law are required to serve the “public interest.” This bedrock principle embodies the broadcasters’ bargain with the government – in return for a valuable license to use the public airwaves, broadcasters agree to act as a trustee of the public interest.

This means broadcasters must air programming that responds to the needs and interests of the community, including local elections, news, community events, and

weather or other public safety warnings. They should also broadcast a certain amount of material that is appropriate for children, and reflect local community standards.

They should provide opportunities for local self-expression and reach out to make sure coverage reflects the makeup of the community. For example, we are inviting representatives of the Native American community to get their perspective on how issues of concern to them are treated.

In today's information age, local broadcasters continue to be the primary source of local news, weather, public affairs programming, and emergency information. Through their editorial and programming choices and interactions with the community, they play an important part in making our democracy function at its best.

Many broadcasters exhibit a deep and unwavering commitment to their local communities, including some real standouts here in Rapid City. The FCC should strive to ensure that all broadcasters do so, and should see what we can learn from broadcasters who are owned locally, as compared to those owned by multinational conglomerates.

Some of my colleagues, including Commissioner Michael Copps, who has been a leader in urging better local coverage by broadcasters, will also attend the hearing. I hope many of you will join me in welcoming them to the Black Hills.

FCC Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein will join his colleagues, including Commissioner Michael Copps, at an FCC-sponsored public hearing on Broadcast Localism on Wednesday, May 26th, from 5:30 pm to 9:00 pm at the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, Surbeck Student Center Ballroom, 501 East Saint Joseph Street in Rapid City. The public is invited to attend and speak.