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Deborah Taylor Tate

FCC commissioner aims to hear all sides of issues

On Nov. 9, 2005, President George W. Bush nominated Deborah Taylor Tate to the FCC for the remainder of a term expiring June 30, 2007. She was unanimously confirmed by the U.S. Senate and sworn in as FCC commissioner on Jan. 3, 2006. Last month, President Bush announced his intention to nominate Tate to a second term that would keep her at the FCC another five years, until June 2012.

Beginning your career: I'm a lawyer by trade. I graduated from law school and went directly to work for then-Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander. Most of my professional life has been spent in some type of public service. I then worked for another governor, so I've worked for two governors, directed a public policy institute at Vanderbilt and, most recently, was the chairman and commissioner at the Tennessee Regulatory Authority, which is the counterpart of

Liner Notes

Profile:

Deborah Taylor Tate

Title:

FCC commissioner

Favorite radio

format: "News when I wake up, talk and country during the day, and at night I listen to jazz or R&B."

Favorite TV show:

"News, news, news."

Favorite song:

"What a Wonderful World"

Favorite movie:

On your appointment to the FCC I don't really know how it happened. Having worked at the state level, I had a great opportunity to work on issues that were before Congress and the FCC. Because I had also worked for two governors who were and are members of Congress, I had some contact with members of Congress. And I guess it doesn't hurt that I go to church and live down the street from former majority leader Bill Frist.

Your first day at the FCC: I walked in to an empty desk with a stack of videotapes and was told I needed to watch the tapes. We had an indecency item before us. It was a very odd introduction to what my job would be like. Every single day here is different, and that's what makes it such an exciting, interesting and actually fun place to work.

How the FCC works: There are different levels of decision-making at the FCC. There are hundreds of items important to a radio station owner that I may never see because they are extremely technical issues, and the bureau has been delegated the authority to deal with those.

As a commissioner, my first duty and role is to enforce the particular law or rule or regulation, and that's always where I try to start. I also try to make sure I'm hearing all sides. Commentors have the ability to both comment and then supply reply comments. As commissioners, no

"To Kill a Mockingbird"

Favorite restaurant:

"My back porch at my house in Nashville and Sunset Grill in Nashville."

Beverage of choice:

Fiji Water and champagne

Hobbies:

"Before the FCC, I had a lot of hobbies. I used to water and snow ski and golf, and I used to have a beautiful garden. And traveling with my family."

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more than two of us can meet together by law. And in fact, many members of Congress are interested in our being able to meet together so we can work more toward consensus. Everyone on the commission is totally committed to a consensus-building process. But actually, it's a little difficult, it's more like shuttle diplomacy.

Biggest challenge: Our biggest challenge as an agency is to make sure we're allowing the marketplace to work while balancing the impact on consumers. It's sometimes difficult when every single decision or every item in front of us is on the front page of newspapers across the country, sometimes even before we've made the decision.

State of radio: Excellent. I think like many other sectors, not only within the media industry but also in wireless, in telecom and all the industries we intersect with, this is just an absolutely transformational time, as we move into the digital age, as we have all types of new services, new innovations, new technologies, just what consumers are able to experience, whether it's in a handheld device in their car or in their home. Consumers are seeing all this dynamic change in the business model, and the industry itself is also facing a lot of change and a lot of competition from new players that possibly have never been around before.

Issues you would like to see broadcasters focus on: First and foremost, I would hope broadcasters would always keep serving their communities, which is both a legal requirement and, I would hope, their own business model. Both here and in my previous positions, I've tried to be a voice for children and families, so I am hopeful the industry will do all it can to police itself to continue to provide positive, uplifting, informative and decent content to consumers.

How broadcasters should communicate to your office: We want to meet and hear from everyone. We want to hear how this is working both from the broadcasters' side and also from the public's side. It's important for broadcasters to realize that whenever there is a topic they care about on either side, they should send us something as well as letting us know how it relates to you and how it helps or hurts your business. It's easy to file comments. Just go to fcc.gov.

Something about the FCC that would surprise our readers to learn: That we're involved in almost every single American's everyday life, from opening the garage door to talking on your cell phone to approving medical devices like diabetes monitors for children. Every single day is different.

Most influential individual: Lamar, my first boss and his wife, Honey Alexandra, now, of course, Sen. Alexander. He has an extraordinary knack of processing and solving problems, in addition to being a concert pianist. And I have great respect for his intellect, but also the way he can size up a problem and work toward a solution. His favorite quote to the staff was, "Plan your work and work your plan."

Career highlight: I am certainly proud of the president nominating me and the Senate unanimously confirming me to this job.

Career disappointment: Everybody has disappointments. I lost an election for the state legislature, and now I look back and think it is the greatest thing that ever happened to me because I wouldn't be here today, and I think I would have been very frustrated not being able to make a difference.

Advice to broadcasters: Make sure that not only is your audience listening to you, but that you are listening to your audience.

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—Deborah Taylor Tate