

Testimony of David Duitch, Vice President, Belo Capital Bureau
Before the Federal Communications Commission
Field Hearing on Hurricane Katrina Recovery Efforts
Thursday, September 15, 2005

Good morning. My name is David Duitch. I am the Vice President of Belo Corp.'s Capital Bureau in Washington, D.C. Belo is the parent company of WWL-TV, the market-leading CBS affiliate in New Orleans. I am standing in for my WWL colleagues today as they are continuing their comprehensive local coverage of one of the most tragic stories in American history. During this disaster, I coordinated sending Belo employees to the New Orleans area to help cover the story and to provide much-needed relief for WWL staff. As such, I have been in constant contact with WWL personnel.

I am pleased to report that WWL-TV has remained on the air continuously -- before, during and after this disaster -- providing critical news and information to the New Orleans community and those affected by this terrible tragedy. Our 24-hour-a-day, non-stop hurricane coverage continued for nine straight days, commercial free for all but the first few hours, from noon on Saturday, August 28, until 10:35 p.m. on Tuesday, September 6.

The employees of WWL-TV have shown heroic measures of dedication and fortitude in covering this story despite their own extreme personal losses and separation from their family and friends. They have worked tireless hours to provide this public service. And yet, WWL employees do not see themselves as heroes. In their eyes, they were just doing their job. Serving the local community is their job.

WWL-TV is a provider of *local* news and information; and, as such, our focus was on serving the New Orleans community and all the constituencies of that community wherever they were located or relocated. Due to strong winds, floods and lack of electricity throughout the area, cable, satellite, and other modes of communication were not an option. Over-the-air television and radio were the only ways that many people could get information, and were often the best ways for local authorities to communicate with each other and the public.

WWL-TV and other local television and radio stations were a critical part of the first alert system. When it became evident that the storm was headed toward New Orleans, WWL began wall-to-wall hurricane coverage, alerting the local community about the impending

dangers and urging New Orleanians to evacuate. We provided critical information about traffic routes, informing them of the safest and least congested ways to leave the city. Our traffic reporter was crucial to safe evacuation, and our meteorologist provided critical, timely updates on the coming storm. Mayor Nagin praised WWL and other local broadcasters for helping the city achieve an 80 percent evacuation rate, much higher than the typical 50 percent or less.

It was pre-planning with a catastrophe in mind as well as the dedication of our employees that kept WWL-TV on the air.

As the severity of the storm and its potential impact became clear, WWL management asked their 85 news, production and engineering employees who could stay to cover the storm, and 80 of the 85 employees volunteered to do whatever was necessary to provide this public service. The five who left were the sole caregivers for their children. Other non-news employees volunteered to stay as well to help.

Because of the hurricane, flooding and looting, WWL originated coverage from four different facilities over the first five days of the disaster. Two years ago, WWL's management set up an arrangement with LSU to use their broadcast facilities for such an emergency. And in 1999, when WWL replaced its transmitter for digital conversion, the site was selected and the transmitter facility was built with a Category 5 hurricane in mind. The transmitter site in Gretna, Louisiana is 18 feet above sea level which is one of the primary reasons we have been able to stay on air throughout this disaster. The transmitter building includes an emergency broadcast facility able to withstand hurricane-level winds. We knew WWL needed to be there for the New Orleans community. For much of the first few days, live coverage switched between LSU, the transmitter site and our primary facility in the French Quarter, which was habitable until the flooding began. By Wednesday, August 31, we had made arrangements to broadcast from the larger facility of Louisiana Public Broadcasting's KLPB-TV in Baton Rouge.

Many dramatic moments have occurred as we have played out our role of public service. You may have seen the compelling footage of one of WWL's technical employees running through the rising water to rescue a man out of the window of his quickly-submerging car. In another location, a woman handed her baby to one of our reporters, asking her to take her child to safety.

WWL is still airing hurricane coverage supplemented with network and syndicated programming. We continue to provide critical local information to the New Orleans community. Viewers turn to WWL to find out if and when they can return to their parish to check on their houses and belongings. We tell them exactly what identification they need, who they need to see, where they need to go to gain access and how they can safely reach these locations. Because of their personal connection to WWL, hundreds of New Orleanians have stopped by our facilities in Baton Rouge to ask for help and information.

As we've covered this story, WWL's local roots have been very important. We've received access to places because police and other officials in New Orleans know who we are and know we're committed to the people of New Orleans. And our long-term commitment and news leadership in New Orleans has provided us valuable access to Mayor Nagin of New Orleans and other local and state officials. We have provided them an open door to our facility, wherever we are located, to speak directly to the community. We have worked hand-in-hand with the first responders and all other governmental authorities, providing a lifeline to the citizens of New Orleans. Also, Mr. Chairman, the FCC stood ready to help us, and we thank you.

The support of WWL's Belo family has been critical to the success of this operation. Belo employees in Dallas worked tirelessly to secure adequate communications, housing, security, fuel for our generators at various locations, food and clothing, and set up an employee relief fund. The Company sent in Belo news, production and technical staff from around the nation to help cover the story. In addition, Belo television stations and newspapers have raised more than \$16 million in their local communities so far for the Red Cross and other relief organizations.

This has been a long and weary road, but one we have traveled with an incredible sense of purpose. We were determined to keep WWL on the air for the good of the New Orleans community. We know of many that accessed WWL from battery-operated televisions or used generators to view our coverage. Many scattered evacuees watched WWL's live streaming of its coverage on the station's Web site (wwltv.com). Importantly, the content provided for internet streaming was only available because of the infrastructure of our over-the-air television station. Others listened to radio stations that were streaming WWL's television coverage, or watched on the local PBS and cable channels carrying WWL

in Louisiana and Mississippi. Thousands of displaced New Orleanians watched WWL in evacuation centers in Texas. Policymakers should specially note that evacuees and others throughout the nation were able to access WWL's coverage on the digital multicast channels of more than 30 television stations (see attached list). Clearly, the role of free, over-the-air television cannot be underestimated in times like these. A small sampling of emails that reinforce this point are attached to our testimony.


This short tape shows the importance the local community places on the role of local broadcasters like WWL-TV and why we're fiercely committed to this high level of public service. We're going to show two successive clips – one from a New Orleans police superintendent and another from a viewer. [Play tapes.]

Thank you for the opportunity to be here.

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From:
To: Sandy Breland
Date: Tuesday - September 6, 2005 9:48 PM
Subject: Just a Note of Thanks
 Mime.822 (2466 bytes) [\[View\]](#) [\[Save As\]](#)

To you and the staff at WWL for doing such a fantastic job of reporting the stories and events following Katrina. I am a south Louisiana transplant in Dallas as are many, many of my friends. And without your reporting my New Orleans relatives (who fled to numerous cities) and I would have been without critical and valuable information. Indeed, know that even while power was lost in New Orleans and Baton Rouge untold numbers were able to get important information about the status of the disaster by streaming your video on the internet and then talking to our families via the sporadic cell service. The national news coverage paled in comparison to the detailed information and meaningful local coverage your team provided around the clock under the most difficult of circumstances.

So, once again, thanks to you and WWL and WWL.com for broadcasting tirelessly for New Orleans and her citizens in our time of need.

Regards,

Dallas, Texas 75201

-----Original Message-----

From:

Sent: Thursday, September 01, 2005 4:48 PM

To: ameadows@belo.com

Subject: Fwd: Thanks to WWL

> Amy:

>

> I would like to commend Belo for their efforts to
> assist WWL employees and their families. I must
> comment the employees of WWL. As a former resident
> of
> New Orleans who still has a tremendous amount of
> family and friends in the area I have constantly
> been
> monitoring the WWL site. I was only recently able
> to
> reach family who evaluated to Hattiesburg, MS and
> they
> too have been receiving their news from a radio
> broadcast of WWL.

>

> The dedication of your staff to stay on air even
> after
> having to relocate to Baton Rouge has been a

sacrifice

> I know many more like me appreciate. National news
> coverage has been focusing primarily on the heart of
> New Orleans. But there are millions of others who
> made their home in the many towns that surround the
> city itself and make up Greater New Orleans. It is
> on WWL that you can find information about these
> surrounding areas. As a local station, they
> understand the true picture of the city and its wide
> variety of residents.

>

> Belo should be extremely proud of the hard working
> people ... I know many viewers are as we continue to
> closely monitor the situation and reach loved
> ones!!!

>

> Regards,

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>

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>

Mail Message

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From:
To: Sandy Breland
Date: Monday - September 5, 2005 10:08 PM
Subject: Thank you all
 Mime.822 (2705 bytes) [\[View\]](#) [\[Save As\]](#)

I cannot adequately express my admiration and respect for you and your team for the work you have done throughout this disaster. I began watching your station online before the hurricane even hit. Your team has been nothing short of superhuman... and yet so basically human.

So many folks around the world have a deep, soft spot in their hearts for New Orleans (I among them), and your team's clear love of their city came shining through, even as they found their own lives and own homes turned upside down.

Your stories, large and small, your dispensing of RELIABLE information and insights when none was seemingly available from our federal and even many state officials, should earn you and your staff the very highest of journalistic honors.

But even that will never be enough for the work you've done.

I continue to be moved by the stories you uncover. I think of your cameraman (I cannot recall his name) who simply went out to the levee and shot footage of survivors, just letting folks speak while barely being able to contain his own grief.


Thank you, again. You are as much heroes as those who rescue survivors from rooftops. Communication is critical during such calamities (as proven by this event), and you and your team have gone above and beyond.

Evanston, IL 60202

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From:
To: Sandy Breland, Mike Schaefer, Mark Swinney, Chris Slaughter, x.smtp."tbordelon@wwltv.com"
Date: Friday - September 9, 2005 8:37 PM
Subject: Your staff, coverage of H. Katrina and observations
 Mime.822 (3770 bytes) [\[View\]](#) [\[Save As\]](#)

Just wanted to say I have watched your program almost since the hurricane blew through. I have found your coverage uplifting and encouraging on so many levels, finding good where ever you could find it, even when it was thin pickings for a while. Your people have shown an awesome amount of restraint, falling to fall victim to rumor, criticism, and finger pointing. You reported, updated, and informed all everything you could find that directed others to hope, to resurrect, to carry on and thanked those who where giving everything they had to the efforts to save, rebuild and just in general, show the people of your area how strong you could be. I know most of your staff has suffered deprivations, houses flooded or non existant, concern for their families, pets and loved ones. I know more than one worked and trudged on despite their own personal tragedies. I want to thank you, from the heart of Tennessee and to let you know, you, your communities and your people are being prayed for here. Our hearts and donations of food, water, people to assist and homes for your people displaced have poured out to you in your time of need. Please know we will make any you send us welcome, till they can return to their homes. We will comfort them and pray for them until your community is restored and your people can return! God bless and keep you to fight another day! Keep on putting one foot in front of the other! You are a source of comfort, promise, and sanity in a sea of back biting, finger pointing, depravity and chaos. Hold your heads high, you are making a difference in your community and to those of us following you from far away! I pray blessings for all of you and your communities!
 Sincerely,

Bristol, Tennessee
 "A good place to live!"

Click here to donate to the Hurricane Katrina relief effort.
<http://store.yahoo.com/redcross-donate3/>

Here is more (from general manager in Beaumont - - kfdm)

Peter, I don't mean to add to your email stack, but I'm going to send you a couple of these kinds of notes to let you and the folks at WWL how well their coverage is being received here in our market.

Larry

From: .
Sent: Thursday, September 01, 2005 4:25 PM
To: larryb@kfdm.com

9/2/2005

Subject: Channel 21 Coverage

KUDUS to you and your organization for making it possible for WWL TV to continue to serve their base (and us) on Channel 21...we have nearly stopped watching other channels for hurricanes news because WWLTV is so good! Thank you, thank you, thank you!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Orange TX


.....
From:
To: <hdtv@kfdm.com>
Sent: Thursday, September 01, 2005 4:30 PM
Subject: WWL

> I would like to thank you for broadcasting WWL TV of New Orleans on
> digital
> 6.2. I have family in my home from New Orleans and they have enjoyed
> keeping
> updated more so than with CNN, MSNBC or FOX News.
>
>
> Orange, Texas 77630
>

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From:
To: Sandy Breland, Mike Schaefer, Mark Swinney, Chris Slaughter, x.smtp."tbordelon@wwltv.com"
Date: Sunday - September 4, 2005 9:49 PM
Subject: Storm Coverage
 [TEXT.htm \(871 bytes\)](#) [\[View\]](#) [\[Open\]](#) [\[Save As\]](#)
[Mime.822 \(3637 bytes\)](#) [\[View\]](#) [\[Save As\]](#)

I know the times have been tough for all WWL employees, but thank you for being so dedicated to your job and keeping us New Orleanians updated on the storm. What a terrible tragedy.

This extended family of 20 has spent the last week huddled up by the computer in Texas watching your continuous coverage. We have especially been moved by the coverage provided by Lee Zurik. He has helped us deal with this awful event by his honesty, insight, and passion for our city. I have cried, laughed, and been inspired about the future after watchingg his coverage.

Thank you WWL. You are true New Orleanians!

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WWL Carriage on Other Multicast Channels

Market	Multicast Channel
Albany, New York	WRGB
Austin, Texas	KVUE
Beaumont, Texas	KFDM
Beckley / Bluefield / Oak Hill, West Virginia	WVNS
Birmingham, Alabama	WBMA
Boston, Massachusetts	WHDH
Chicago, Illinois	WCIU
College Station, Texas	KAMU
Dallas, Texas	WFAA
Detroit, Michigan	WDIV
Detroit, Michigan	WDWB
Eastern Shore of Delaware, Maryland and Virginia	WBOC
Hartford / New Haven, Connecticut	WFSB
Houston, Texas	KHOU
La Crosse / Eau Claire, Wisconsin	WQOW
Lubbock, Texas	KJTV
Mankato, Minnesota	KEYC
Miami, Florida	WPLG
Minneapolis / St. Paul, Minnesota	KSTP
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma	KFOR
Orlando, Florida	WKMG
Paducah / Cape Girardeau / Harrisburg, Illinois	WSIL
Panama City, Florida	WJHG
Portland, Oregon	KGW
Richmond, Virginia	WTVR
Rochester, New York	WXXI
Salt Lake City, Utah	KTVX
San Antonio, Texas	KENS
Sarasota, Florida	WWSB
Shreveport, Louisiana	KTBS
Springfield / Holyoke, Massachusetts	WSHM
Springfield / Holyoke, Massachusetts	WWLP
Syracuse, New York	WTVH
West Palm Beach, Florida	WPEC

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