

**Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Atlanta, Georgia**

**Comments of Fred Young
Vice-President for News
Hearst-Argyle Television Inc.**

September 15, 2005

Good morning. My name is Fred Young, and I am the Senior Vice-President of News for Hearst-Argyle Television, Inc. Hearst-Argyle owns or manages 28 local broadcast television stations throughout the country. The most critical public service our stations provide is the broadcast of local emergency and public safety information. So I am honored today to share with you how our television stations in New Orleans, Jackson and Orlando joined together to provide a virtual "information lifeline" to Gulf Coast residents before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina.

The Katrina warnings came early and often at WDSU-TV, our NBC affiliated station in New Orleans. As the storm approached the mainland on Saturday and Sunday, we were in constant contact with local law enforcement officials in every affected Parish, with national weather service officials, and with the mayor of New Orleans (who addressed our viewers three times on Saturday). Our newscasts repeatedly relayed critical emergency preparedness information, including the projected path and impact of

the storm, the pressing need for all persons to evacuate the city, and the safest places to seek shelter.

Starting at 5 a.m. Saturday morning, we were broadcasting nothing but news and weather—with accompanying warnings, evacuation routes, detailed weather coverage and on-the-spot reporting throughout our viewing area. By 5 o'clock Saturday afternoon, WDSU-TV was operating a Hurricane hotline inside the studio. Station employees and community volunteers came in to answer telephone calls from anxious residents asking where to go, how to get there, and how to prepare for the worst. We, and our colleagues at other broadcast stations, are the “first informers” in times of local emergencies and natural disasters.

There were no NASCAR races on WDSU-TV that weekend. No sitcoms. No movies. No golf. WDSU-TV allocated every minute of the broadcast day to weather warnings, flood information, evacuation information, relief information and interviews with emergency management personnel.

On Monday morning, at the height of the storm, our transmitter took on water and shut down. Our staff, though, did not shut down. Within 45 minutes, we were streaming continuous news coverage to viewers on WDSU-TV's web site and offering it to any other station available. We evacuated much of our staffs to another Hearst-Argyle station—WAPT-TV in Jackson, Mississippi—where our combined staffs worked tirelessly (and without electricity or running water) to develop comprehensive and

continuous hurricane coverage that was broadcast over-the-air from WAPT-TV, Jackson and also streamed over the Internet from our station in Orlando, WESH-TV. (To date, more than 25 million page views have been recorded on our web site.)

Our efforts to keep our viewers informed did not come without personal risk and loss to our staff. The final WDSU-TV personnel evacuated our building on Tuesday morning after the levees broke. Our news crews, however, remained behind to cover the story. Some were stranded on a rooftop for two days. Others were stranded in a hospital where the doors were locked to protect patients against looters and rising floodwaters. Many of the staff members at WDSU-TV and WAPT-TV—all of whom have now been accounted for—suffered great loss, including the loss of their homes, their cars, and innumerable personal possessions. We are eternally grateful for their tireless public service during these trying times.

After the storm subsided, we continued to provide critical relief and recovery information to our viewers—even to those who had been displaced to different cities. We quickly returned to the air in New Orleans thanks to WPXL-TV, the local PAX station, which allowed WDSU-TV to broadcast hurricane coverage and relief information throughout the New Orleans market. We also began broadcasting to residents in Houston on KPXB-TV, another PAX station and to residents in Baton Rouge on WBTR, a local independent station. And in Jackson and Monroe, Louisiana we are broadcasting on local Time Warner Cable channels and on DirecTV and the DISH network. WDSU-TV is producing 17 hours of news a day from Orlando and Jackson, with photographers and

reporters on location in New Orleans. Our company has retained the services of a private security firm to protect our staff members as they go about gathering and reporting public safety information.

As a local broadcaster with 40-plus years in the business, I am disappointed when the critical role the broadcast industry plays in times of natural disaster may not be fully understood by those who advocate premature return of the analog spectrum to the government. Fast forward to a time we are broadcasting in digital with multiple—not just one, but multiple—streams of news and public safety information to our viewers around the clock. It is essential that the TV sets of all viewers be able to receive this information. We have, and always will, work successfully with public officials and first responders to assist in rescue, relief, and recovery efforts—making sure emergency information flows freely between public safety officials and our viewers. Our role in communicating information during a disaster reveals, time and time again, just how critical it is that *all viewers*—not just those who can afford to pay for television service—have access to the program content of local broadcast stations.

Given the critical role broadcasters play as “first informers” in times of emergencies, the private sector and government must work together to strengthen the broadcast media’s transmission and reception infrastructure. Hearst-Argyle CEO David Barrett serves as chairman of the Media Security and Reliability Council, an advisory group formed by the Commission after September 11 to develop a strategy for securing and sustaining the nation’s broadcast, cable, and satellite facilities system during terrorist

attacks and natural disasters. We look forward to continuing that effort to mitigate the impact on the public of future disasters.

I'll close by praising Norman Robinson, the longtime anchor of WDSU. As the flood waters rose, Norman paced the halls of our station in Jackson, weeping over the well-being of his 8-year old granddaughter who was among those missing in New Orleans. Moments later, he would pull himself together, walk into the studio and present the news to the people of New Orleans. His heartache was not visible to those watching. Fortunately, the beautiful young granddaughter was found alive and well, and Norman continues to be a comforting and confident voice of information and support for the people of New Orleans still reeling and recovering from their own losses.

Thank you again, Members of the Commission, for allowing me the honor to speak to you today on behalf of Heart-Argyle and its continuing efforts to provide the people of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region with critical public safety and public service information.
