

Good morning. My name is Doug Krile. I am Executive Director of the Arkansas Broadcasters Association. ABA is a not-for-profit trade association representing approximately 190 radio stations and 15 television stations in Arkansas.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and briefly discuss some of the key issues impacting broadcasters in Arkansas. Many of our member stations (particularly the radio stations) are locally owned and operate in the rural parts of Arkansas. As such, they play a vital role in providing emergency information AND contributing to the day-to-day lives of listeners and viewers who live in those areas

When a sudden flood killed 20 campers at a remote campground in Southwest Arkansas in 2010, radio and TV stations were the only sources of information as the heavy rain developed. The campground was outside of the range of a nearby NOAA weather station. The broadcast stations also became the source of information on victims – and survivors.

After Hurricane Katrina, the Arkansas Parks and Tourism agency developed a system to help evacuees from nearby Louisiana and Mississippi get updated information about the availability of food and shelter in Arkansas. Key to the system's success was the utilization of radio and TV stations to tell evacuees about the system.

Because many of our radio station members are essentially family-owned and operate on very slim profit margins, ABA feels compelled to argue against Congressional efforts to impose a new licensing fee for musical performers. We believe strongly that radio stations' provision of free air time to play performers' music is fair compensation, and any additional fees could, literally, force some stations off the air.

Other key issues focus more on the television side of our industry. Changes to the Retransmission Consent system proposed by the pay TV industry would harm stations here. Currently, financial terms of cable, satellite and telecommunication company carriage of local television stations are negotiated in a free and open marketplace. Many times, our small-market TV station members must negotiate against very large pay TV providers. Despite this, broadcasters support the market-based system Congress created, which results in both sides reaching an agreement keeping broadcast stations on pay TV systems without interruption in almost all cases. And of course, broadcast signals are always available to consumers free, over-the-air via an antenna.

The pay TV industry is pushing for changes in the law that would tilt the retransmission consent negotiation process in its favor. Ultimately, altering the process to favor pay TV providers will mean less choice for consumers and fewer dollars for local stations to use for news and public affairs programming, not to mention emergency weather coverage.

The other issue of concern to television broadcasters involves the FCC's upcoming auction of broadcast spectrum. While the ABA does not oppose a truly voluntary spectrum auction, we agree with the National Association of Broadcasters that the process must ensure that broadcasters who do not participate in the auction retain their current coverage areas so they can continue to serve their local communities. We also believe the FCC should work to limit the number of stations that must move to new channels during the repacking. Currently, over 700,000 television viewers here in Arkansas receive ALL of their TV programming over-the-air. Forced channel changes will disrupt those viewing habits, harming consumers and broadcasters. Television stations (and the ABA) are STILL fielding phone calls from consumers who are confused by the digital conversion that happened several years ago! To ensure that TV viewers' interests are protected, we ask Congress to carefully oversee the FCC's implementation of the incentive auction legislation.