

**STATEMENT OF DANA DAVIS REHM
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NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO
SENATE COMMERCE COMMITTEE
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Good Morning Chairman Inouye, Senator Stevens and Members of the Senate Commerce Committee. I am Dana Davis Rehm, Senior Vice President for Strategy and Partnerships for National Public Radio. I am pleased to offer the perspectives of NPR and its 850 member stations on the Committee’s hearing topic this morning – the future of radio. Actually, I’m more than pleased, I thrilled to be here. At NPR and within public radio we believe we are charting the future course of radio.

The future of radio depends on programming and content first and foremost. In the arena of high-quality radio content, NPR and public radio have no peers. Each week, some over 30 million Americans tune into public radio stations to engage with programming like *Morning Edition*, the most listened to morning program in all of radio, and *All Things Considered*, our afternoon newsmagazine, which went live for the first time 37 years ago this past May. These two vibrant, enduring programs draw on reporting from correspondents based in 18 bureaus around the world, and producers and reporters in 19 locations in the U.S. But the strength of the NPR and member station news network goes far beyond this corps of international and national NPR reporters, and reaches into communities across America.

During the last three decades, leading NPR member stations significantly increased the amount of news programming on their broadcast schedules, while also investing in local reporting and programming. Strong news oriented public radio stations exist today in most of the top markets across the country. When the strength of these stations is combined with NPR’s strength in national and

international reporting, the result is one of the largest, most capable, and most trusted news network organizations anywhere in the world.

Within NPR and our public radio station partners, nothing is more important than the trust of the public in the content we create and distribute. We work nonstop to ensure that our programming always meets the highest standards of public service in journalism and cultural expression. And our audiences demand and expect constant improvement in breadth, depth, reliability, perspective, accuracy and access.

While many radio entities would be satisfied simply with two programs like *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*, NPR continues to develop, produce and distribute new shows to improve our public service mission. *Tell Me More*, launched just a few months ago is hosted by Michel Martin, a dynamic journalist with deep experience in programming, focuses on the way we live, intersect and collide in a culturally diverse world. *News & Notes*, hosted by Farai Chideya, whose expertise is in broadcasting and digital media, explores new topics that more diverse audiences are seeking.

Other public radio production and distribution organizations, namely American Public Media and Public Radio International, continue to develop new programming offerings to explore the ever changing composition of America and the world. You may know American Public Media for *A Prairie Home Companion* with the incomparable Garrison Keillor, one of America's most accomplished and beloved storytellers. But APM is much more. It is home to programs like *Marketplace*, *Speaking of Faith* and a very powerful new concept, Public Insight Journalism, which has now created a Public Insight Network. This network is comprised of thousand of listeners who are willing to share their experiences and knowledge with radio producers and reporters. It is built on the premise that the audience has perspectives and insights that can help journalists cover the news with greater authenticity and uncover stories that would otherwise go untold.

Similarly, Public Radio International is innovating in radio and on the web. They distribute *This American Life*, from Chicago Public Radio, a remarkable production that documents and describes contemporary life in the United States and *The World*, an international newsmagazine co-produced with the BBC and WGBH Boston. Through a non-profit subsidiary non-profit called Public Interactive, they are helping hundreds of public radio stations to extend the life of their programming and create a vibrant web presence in their communities.

While content is the first principle, the future of radio depends on technology. In public radio, we know that our audience is demanding changes in how and when we provide programming to them. The old broadcast model of “if you build it, they will come”, no longer holds true. As we often say, our listeners want programming on their terms, whenever and wherever it is most useful to them and to be delivered on a multitude of reception devices. To them, it is all the public radio experience.

It remains true that over the air broadcasting will be the principle distribution path for most public radio programs today and for the foreseeable future. But even in over the air radio broadcasting, the last enclave of the old analogue world, change is rapidly occurring. As of today, more than 600 public radio stations are moving to digital operations. By the end of 2007, we anticipate 350 stations to be on the air with digital signals, and of those more than 100 will be multicasting, serving their communities and listeners with not one, but two or more streams of public radio programming.

We view the transition to digital broadcasting as a tool to improve and broaden the reach of our programming to poorly served, un-served audiences. We will use it to make radio reading services for the blind and hearing impaired more accessible. Our vision is that in the not too distant future, listeners to radio reading services will no longer need a special receiver; any new digital radio will have the ability to offer that public service. And for the first time, the 23 million deaf and

hard of hearing Americans will have access to real time public radio programming in the form of text that displays on the next generation of digital radios.

This summer we launched Radio Ahora—produced by Radio Netherlands for distribution by NPR. It mixes together 10-12 hours of live daily programs with documentaries and archival material, all in Spanish. Radio Ahora is targeted at people from Central and South America, doing so by focusing on editorial concerns of that area, regional accents, and a large number of correspondents in those countries.

We also offer streams of classical music, jazz and folk so that our member stations can expand their community service. All of these efforts are only the beginning of the public service potential of digital radio. Its inherently inclusive nature makes it a perfect fit for public radio's relentless pursuit of public service.

Given the increasing adoption of new content platforms - from online to hand-held devices - and the accelerating changes in media usage patterns, public radio has significantly greater opportunities to gather news, share information, build communities of interest, and fulfill its public service mission. Thus, expansion and improvement of public radio websites and web content are priorities that demand our attention. Public radio stations and public radio program producers are taking advantage of the vast “space” created by the web to bring broader, deeper and more varied content to those who listen to our programs and then visit our websites to learn more. The web also allows us to serve audiences who are not familiar with public radio, as our content increasingly surfaces on search engines. We estimate that the primary program producers' websites in the public radio systems – NPR, MPR and PRI – have 8 million unique visitors each month. We estimate a comparable number of web-visitors to station sites.

This expansion in the use of web-based content for public radio at all levels is a pattern that will continue into the future. Increased use of web-based resources

poses numerous challenges, including making sure that content found in public radio websites is as compelling and important in people's lives as our over-the-air broadcasts. We envision a unique and important public service role on the web. First among these, we will offer distinctive, insightful perspectives on news and issues of the day. Public radio websites bring in voices that aren't presented on every other news site. At their best, they put the audience in touch with events that foster personal growth, create connections to other human beings and strengthen our nation's civil discourse.

The upcoming 2008 elections provide public broadcasting with opportunities to utilize cross platform news gathering tools. NPR and PBS, in partnership with our stations, are pooling significant editorial and technical resources to engage the public at the local, state, regional and national levels. We are developing an online infrastructure that enables public media entities to integrate our collective election-related content on any public media website, while helping to promote local election content throughout the system. Stations and other entities that use these content modules will be able to leverage election-related resources from across the system for online and on-air use. The public will benefit by having greater access to comprehensive election-related content produced and curated by public broadcasters, as well as new opportunities to contribute their own ideas and content to a nationwide civic dialogue.

Other Internet program distribution platforms are gaining wide acceptance among public radio listeners and forcing changes within public radio. Podcasting, for example, which is radio programming content distributed via the Internet to listeners with portable music listening devices, is a term only recently found in the common language of media, but it has become a growing presence in public radio. iTunes reports that NPR and public radio podcasts are among the most popular in this new program distribution service. NPR, in conjunction with a host of public radio stations and producers, has launched a common podcasting platform that routinely has 9 million monthly downloads, with more than 140 million downloads

since the project launch two years ago. Among the most popular are the in-depth interview program *Fresh Air*, *NPR News Story of the Day*, *Talk of the Nation Science Friday*, and *All Songs Considered*. This summer we launched three Spanish language podcasts. *Al Grano*, a Spanish-language news roundtable host by Maria Hinojosa; a Spanish version of the popular *Youth Radio* pieces heard on NPR newsmagazines; and *La Matinal*: a 29 minute daily newsmagazine produced by Radio Netherlands.

On November 5th, NPR will launch a new music service on npr.org in partnership with member stations WBGO, WFUV, WGBH, WXPB, WDUQ, KUT, WKSU, WGUC, MPR (also, American Public Media), KEXP and KPLU. Original concerts, studio sessions, and song discovery features from all of the partners will be brought together in one place where the audience can learn more about music genres and artists rarely heard on commercial radio. Over time, we plan to expand this service to include more member stations.

Just two months ago, we launched the NPR Mobile service, which is unique in its content delivery platform and business model. In partnership with 10 stations, the two products – NPR Mobile Web and NPR Mobile Voice – offer NPR and local station content on handheld devices or any phone line.

The changing demands of new content delivery technologies, and of our audiences who use them, are the catalyst for change in way we are producing content. Whether it's the delivery of news and information, music, entertainment or cultural enrichment shows, assembly of the "bits" that become part of current and future digital delivery systems is increasingly important. Our concept for the future is built upon full utilization of digital technology.

The future of radio is dependent on equal parts of programming and technology so that audiences are engaged with content that enriches, educates and informs at the times and places most convenient and useful to them.

Mr. Chairman, we are investing our resources in both programming and technology. We are expanding in both areas and we are adding staff...reporters, producers, editors...to bring the world, community by community, to our audience.

In contrast to the expansion of regional, national and international news coverage by NPR and others in public radio, the last decade has seen a remarkable retreat in other American broadcast media from serious, careful, and balanced presentation of news, information, and ideas.

Public Radio is responding to this growing trend with Local News Initiative (LNI). This is a national effort to increase public radio's listener service through investments that enhance station capacity to provide quality, in-depth news. As other media continue to retreat from serious local news coverage, many stations have recognized that the need for high quality local content and news is becoming more and more critical. Our goal is to increase the level and quality of serious local news coverage in communities across the nation; strengthen the capacity for local public radio stations to sustain local news efforts; and, create meaningful and long-lasting relationships between NPR, stations and the stations' local communities. Working in partnership with stations and other public radio organizations, the LNI was launched to provide a framework for long-term transformational change that can elevate the ability of both stations and national program producers to better serve the public.

In short, Mr. Chairman, the future of radio rests with programming, technology and ceaseless efforts to connect with the American people. In each case, NPR and public radio are leading the way.