

A PROJECT OF THE USC ANNENBERG SCHOOL'S NORMAN LEAR CENTER

## Remarks of FCC Commissioner Michael J. Copps

Walter Cronkite Award Luncheon  
USC Annenberg School for Communication  
Los Angeles, California April 19, 2007

**USC ANNENBERG**

The Norman Lear  
**CENTERTAINMENT**  
Exploring Implications of the Convergence of Entertainment, Commerce, and Society

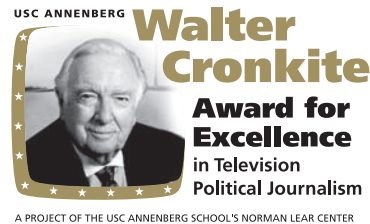
### **The Norman Lear Center**

The Norman Lear Center is a multidisciplinary research and public policy center exploring implications of the convergence of entertainment, commerce, and society. From its base in the USC Annenberg School for Communication, the Lear Center builds bridges between eleven schools whose faculty study aspects of entertainment, media, and culture. Beyond campus, it bridges the gap between the entertainment industry and academia, and between them and the public. For more information, please visit [www.learcenter.org](http://www.learcenter.org).



### **Walter Cronkite Awards**

Since 2000, the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center has honored outstanding achievements in political coverage with the USC Annenberg Walter Cronkite Award for Excellence in Television Political Journalism. The purpose of the award, named for the most prestigious broadcast journalist of the past forty years, is to encourage and showcase television journalistic excellence in political coverage, particularly innovative, issue-focused coverage that informs viewers about their electoral choices. The award recognizes coverage that helps viewers understand who the candidates are; what the issues and ballot propositions are; how electoral choices will affect their lives; how to assess campaign information, including advertising; and how to register, vote and make their own voices heard. For more information, please visit [www.reliableresources.org](http://www.reliableresources.org).



### **FCC COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Michael J. Copps has been a member of the Federal Communications Commission since 2001. Mr. Copps served from 1998 until 2001 as Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Trade Development at the U.S. Department of Commerce. In that role, Mr. Copps worked to improve market access and market share for nearly every sector of American industry, including information technologies and telecommunications. Mr. Copps devoted much of his time to building private sector-public sector partnerships to enhance our nation's success in the global economy.

From 1993 to 1998, Mr. Copps served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Basic Industries, a component of the Trade Development Unit. Mr. Copps moved to Washington in 1970, joined the staff of Senator Fritz Hollings (D-SC) and served for over a dozen years as Administrative Assistant and Chief of Staff. From 1985 to 1989, he served as Director of Government Affairs for a Fortune 500 Company. From 1989 to 1993, he was Senior Vice President for Legislative Affairs at a major national trade association.

Mr. Copps, a native of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, received a B.A. from Wofford College and earned a Ph.D. in US history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He taught US history at Loyola University of the South from 1967 to 1970. Copps is married to the former Elizabeth Catherine Miller of New Orleans. They have five children and reside in Alexandria, Virginia.



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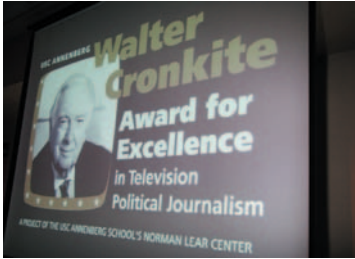
Thank you Dean Kaplan for your very kind introduction. While I am not receiving a Cronkite Award here today, I nevertheless feel greatly honored to be part of this prestigious gathering. And thank you Dean Cowan for having us here at the Annenberg School. Both of you and this great school have provided such visionary and amazing leadership in the crusade to improve political broadcast journalism.

It is an honor to be in the company of the distinguished broadcast journalists who will be recognized after lunch. Their presence testifies not only to their individual achievements, which are considerable, but to what broadcasting is capable of, even amidst the many challenges that confront our country’s media. I am proud to share this platform with them.

But there’s one more source for the honor and pride I feel in being here. And that is because of the name this award bears – Walter Cronkite. There could be no better title for these awards that celebrate and honor the work of today’s best broadcast journalists. Walter Cronkite brings such credibility and adds such stature to this gathering. One of my stellar experiences after joining the FCC was getting to know Walter, to be able now to count him as a friend, and to have the opportunity to work every day at the Commission for the kind of public interest ideals that his career personifies over so many event-filled years, indeed decades. There are many reasons why Walter Cronkite became the most trusted person in America; not the least of these is his ongoing trust in the American people and his life-long commitment to making sure that the media where he works reflects the interests, the diversity and the dreams of his fellow citizens. He lived his ideals and there is no one in our national life that I admire more than this good man.

Many of you have spent the morning, I know, talking, about the state of America’s media. You are part of a budding national dialogue on issues that every citizen in our democracy should be contemplating. Even as we celebrate the enormous accomplishments of our Cronkite Award winners, we are beginning to understand how much more difficult it is to do great things like these in today’s new media environment – how much harder it is for broadcast journalism to flourish in the way that today’s honorees embody.

We live in an age where television stations – as well as newspapers, radio



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**Walter Cronkite**



stations, and just about every other form of media you can think of – are increasingly owned by large corporations, many located hundreds or even thousands of miles away from the communities they serve. We live in an age when job and budget cuts in the broadcast news industry are routine – and I don’t mean Don Imus, here, or even astonishing announcements such as 700 jobs and \$750 million in budget being cut from a major network operation. Just as important is the slow trickle of cuts – death by a thousand cuts – in so many of our local newsrooms. These cuts inflict harm on the industry, harm on communities, harm, lasting harm – on the country.

You don’t need to take my word for it. Listen to what Walter Cronkite himself recently said at a forum on media ownership and the public interest:

“From my perspective, the major problem [with journalism] these days is not with individual journalists or the standards of the profession. The young people I see entering the field of journalism today are no less intelligent or dedicated than in my generation. They are indeed quite brave to be entering a profession with far less job security and far greater economic uncertainty than the one I knew. They do so, I believe, out of a deep sense of commitment to public service.

No – the major problem I see today has to do with unrealistic expectations that *consolidated corporate ownership* puts on working journalists.”

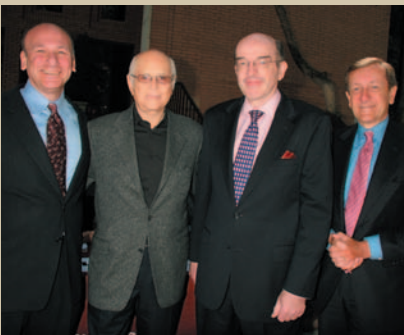
Walter went on to point out that his generation of journalists knew they would have to work hard – after all, their job was to uncover truths that politicians and special interests didn’t want discovered. But at least they expected they’d have the resources to do their job. Now, however, Walter pointed out, they no longer have that expectation. How sad! As he put it:

“Today, I do not believe most journalists have th[e] luxury [of having enough resources]. Instead, they are saddled with inflated profit expectations from Wall Street. They face round after round of job cuts – and cost cuts – that require them to do ever more with ever less. In this “Information Age,” and the very complicated world in which we live, the need for high-quality reporting is greater than ever. It’s not just the journalists’ jobs at risk here – it’s American democracy – it’s freedom’s future.”

But I don’t want to sound all doom and gloom. Certainly Walter Cronkite doesn’t sound that way. He ended his speech saying: “America is a powerful and prosperous nation. We certainly should insist upon – and *can afford to sustain* – a media system of which we can be proud.”

I think that’s just the right way to put it – thankfully, we *are* a rich and powerful nation, and we certainly *can* afford a great media system, even in a moment of great

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Left to Right: Martin Kaplan, Norman Lear, Michael Copps, & Brian Ross

technological ferment and complexity. The question is *how* we manage this transition and ensure that American voters continue to get the high quality news that they need and deserve.

I think each of us in this room has a role to play.

The FCC needs to back off any further loosening of the few media ownership protections we still have. This is not the time for more duopolies, triopolies and sweetheart newspaper-broadcast cross-ownership deals that strangle localism, diversity and competition. But it shouldn't be all about playing defense either – why can't the FCC go on offense? Once upon a time we did things like that.

Here is one idea: let's make FCC license renewal into more than a paper tiger. That means every time a media company comes in to renew a license, it should have to prove it is serving the public interest. No more postcard license renewals – let's actually require a station to show it is providing public affairs programming, genuine children's educational shows, political campaign coverage, and so forth before we renew the license. Let's also make sure all this information is up on the Web, so citizens can know how their airwaves are being used. And let's do license renewal every *three* years – the way it used to be – not every eight.

It is also past time for the FCC to get serious about the public interest in the digital age. Digital TV means a single station can offer up to six individual channels of programming. Do we really need to fill up all that capacity with more nationalized, homogenized corporate programming? Why can't we make sure that a substantial part is dedicated to local programming, independent programming and programming produced by minorities? Right now, minorities make up about 30% of our population and only 3% of station owners – we can do much, much better. We *need* to do better. Our media have an obligation to reflect America's great diversity – and to nourish it. It's a job a long ways from being accomplished.

And of course we need academics and professionals like Marty, Geoff, and many of you in this room to keep up all your good work. This certainly includes good research – like the Lear Center's fantastic work documenting the lack of political coverage on the evening news – that takes the debate out of the realm of anecdote and into the realm of substantive social science.

I'm also talking about events like this one, where working journalists, students, and teachers get together to think about how regulatory and economic issues affect your ability to do good journalism. I know that many journalists generally try to stay out of politics. And I certainly applaud that impulse in most cases – but if anyone is going to tell the story of how journalism is being

affected by media consolidation and other forces, it will have to be the journalists themselves. You have the knowledge and you have the pulpit. This is a tremendously important story – and our democracy is suffering because it goes so often untold.



Finally, and most important of all, each of us – as a citizen – needs to engage in this struggle. Even if the future of our media is not your No. 1 issue, it needs to be – it has to be – your No. 2 issue. That’s because Americans get their input and develop their views about all the other critical issues of the day – like the economy, jobs, peace and war, health care and education – from the media. So if you don’t like the way the media is handling the issues of most concern to you, tell your friends, co-workers, family, everyone you know about it. Encourage them to contact the FCC and those who represent you in the halls of government and to get involved with media reform organizations in their community. Talk about it. Write about it. Sing about it if you have a voice. Above all, do something. Get involved. Be activists in this great cause. Take heart from the work of our Cronkite Award winners and be inspired by the living example of Walter Cronkite himself. Know that through your efforts we can achieve a media truly reflective of the needs and the genius of this great land.

Thank you very much.



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