

**Statement by Senator John McCain**  
**The Localism in Broadcasting Reform Act of 2005**  
**February 15, 2004**

**MR. MCCAIN.** Mr. President, I rise today to introduce the “Localism in Broadcasting Reform Act of 2005.” This legislation would reduce the license term for broadcasters from eight years to three years, thereby requiring broadcasters to provide the Federal Communications Commission (FCC or Commission) with information every three years on why their license should be renewed. Prior to 1981, broadcast licenses were granted for a term of three years.

The bill would require the full Commission to review five percent of all license and renewal applications. Currently, the Media Bureau randomly audits five percent of all license renewal applications. The FCC first started an audit process back in the 1980s when the FCC changed its license renewal process from one where stations submitted evidence of “public interest” obligations compliance to one where stations self certify compliance (critics call it a “post card renewal”). This section would take the audit process a step further by requiring the Commissioners to review the applications selected for audit rather than the Media Bureau.

The bill would command broadcasters to post on their Internet sites information detailing their commitment to local public affairs programming and children’s programming. The bill also calls for the FCC to complete its proceeding on whether public interest obligations should apply to broadcasters in the digital era.

To ensure that viewers or listeners can fully participate in a broadcaster’s license renewal, the bill would codify the Commission’s rule that a viewer or listener has standing to challenge a license if he demonstrates either that he resides in the station’s service area or that he regularly listens or views the station and that such listening or viewing is not the result of transient contacts with the station.

Lastly, the bill would allow the Commission, during a license renewal proceeding, to review not only the performance of the station seeking renewal, but also the performance of all stations owned by the licensee seeking renewal. The current statute restricts the Commission’s review only to that station seeking the renewal.

Last June, FCC Chairman Michael Powell and I challenged all local broadcast television and radio stations to provide their local communities with significant information on the local political issues facing communities, the local candidates’ campaign platforms, and the local candidate debates during the 2004 election. In response to the challenge, many broadcasters sent volumes of material detailing their extensive election coverage and committing to increase their coverage in 2004. Today, the Norman Lear Center at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California released findings showing that local news coverage of local political campaigns is dismal. Specifically, the study found that ninety-two percent of the news broadcasts studied contained no stories about races for the U.S. House, state senate or

assembly, mayor, city council, law-enforcement posts, judgeships, education offices, or regional or county offices.

Therefore, I feel it is now time to introduce legislation to bring *local* back into *local broadcasting*. I believe this legislation is a step in the right direction. It will have a small impact on those stations that are currently meeting their public interest obligations, but it should have a large impact on those citizens whose local broadcaster is not meeting its obligations. I refuse to believe that the “public interest” is served by minimal campaign coverage, such as a 12 second sound bite on from a candidate during a half-hour local news program as found in the study. Citizens deserve more from their local broadcaster.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that my remarks and a copy of the bill be printed in the Record.