



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 2, 2005

Press Contact: Meredith McGehee, Campaign Legal Center, 202-669-9919

Andrew Jay Schwartzman, Media Access Project, 202-454-5681

Media Reform Coalition Challenges Milwaukee and Chicago TV Stations' License Renewals

Yesterday, the Campaign Legal Center and the Media Access Project joined with the Milwaukee Public Interest Media Coalition and Chicago Media Action in filing petitions challenging the license renewals of television stations in Milwaukee and Chicago. The groups cited 'market-wide failure' to serve public interest as the basis for the challenge and urged the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to deny their license renewals.

The petitions cited a study by the Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA) which analyzed the five highest-rated local commercial broadcasters' coverage of the 2004 elections in the four weeks preceding the 2004 elections. The results of the study show local election coverage accounted for only 7.8 and 5.2 percent of total airtime devoted to news in Chicago and Milwaukee respectively. In both media markets, the presidential race took the largest portion of election related news: 66 percent in Chicago and 74 percent in Milwaukee. In stark contrast, local and state races accounted for less than two percent of election-related news.

"There was a market-wide failure in these two communities. Broadcasters failed to provide voters in these viewing areas with the information they needed about local races to be the informed voters that are essential to a healthy, working democracy," said Media Policy Program Director Meredith McGehee. "The FCC should not just be a rubber stamp when it comes to license renewals, but should recognize these market failures and take appropriate action to stop broadcasters' 'business-as-usual' approach which uses their broadcast license as essentially a license to mint money."

Media Access Project President Andrew Jay Schwartzman, lead attorney representing the petitioners, added, "These petitions reveal a fundamental marketplace failure in the coverage of what is arguably the most important kind of programming in a modern democracy – coverage of local elections. It is impossible to find that Milwaukee and Chicago TV stations have fulfilled their public interest obligations singly, or taken together."

Along with the CMPA report, the petitions also included declarations by local activists, reporters, citizens and a candidate for state office. McGehee filed an affidavit in the petition supporting the coalition's challenge to broadcasters' license renewal.

The groups concluded that the stations failed to meet the needs of the community they are licensed to serve; therefore, renewal of their licenses would not serve the public interest. They also asked the FCC for a hearing on their petition to deny renewal of the television stations' licenses.

The Media Policy Program of the Campaign Legal Center seeks to revitalize our democracy by helping shape political broadcasting policies and promoting effective enforcement of the public interest obligations of the media.

#