

Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund
FCC TV Re-Licensing Testimony
Grand Rapids, MI
Sept. 13, 2005

On behalf of Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund, I applaud the efforts of the Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy (GRIID). These folks watch nearly forty news broadcasts each week as part of their important work to evoke positive change for all of us. They have both documented aspects of local news coverage critical to our community and have also made a heroic effort educating area residents about the local coverage that we could have – that we should have. Many people do not watch our local TV news stations. Why? They don't care about local news? No. Because our local news broadcasts are too often a combination of re-gurgitated national news stories and sensationalized, local stories having little or no affect on our community.

I've been working as a Community Organizer in Grand Rapids for more than three years. My organizations regularly send out media advisories and do follow up calls to alert the local press about local events, important legislation, critical report findings, and public hearings. We also alert the press about the actions, or inactions of our elected officials, especially in regards to environmental issues about which our community is passionate.

For example, take the issue of poop in the water – sewage overflows. Our community finds it unacceptable that fifty-some BILLION gallons of raw and partially treated sewage flow into Michigan's precious waterways each year. When Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund worked to stop the Bush Administration from making this problem even worse, we received very little coverage. Sure, we got a little when President Bush was in town and we had organized a canoe and kayak flotilla protest on the Grand River. But after scores of volunteers worked to educate the public and send a strong message to the Bush Administration, and the Bush Administration backed down – did any of the news stations cover that VICTORY FOR CLEANER WATER AND PUBLIC HEALTH? Nope.

That is just one example of a missed opportunity to serve the public's best interest. The lack of election coverage is an equally pronounced problem. Voter turnout, for local elections especially, are dismal. How can we expect voters to choose between candidates if they don't know anything about them? Our local news stations should be providing information about the candidates and how they stand on issues. They should be airing candidate forums so voters can view the candidates in action.

To be explicit, those using the public airwaves should be covering state, city and county elections.

Our local news stations should play a larger role in basic voting education as well. When do we vote? How do we vote on the new machines? What do we do if we don't know where to vote?

I look forward to a new, local news commitment to serving the public. Real news, pertinent news. News about, and for the people.