

Good evening, my name is Tim Goodwin, and welcome on behalf of the board of directors of the Grand Rapids Community Media Center.

The Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy is an integral part of the CMC family and our mission of "building community through media."

I grew up in a time, as did some of you out there, when there was still a fairness doctrine and local stations took their public interest obligations seriously.

They still operated mostly in the original sense of the "public interest, convenience and necessity" that the original communications act in 1934 required of them in exchange for the billions of dollars of frequency space that we, the public, gave them FREE. That "social contract" has eroded on every communication front you can name. Indeed, current telecom legislation labels us consumers. We have ceased to be citizens in the eyes of Congress. Consider that.

As amazing as that seems, I'm likewise amazed at how few people vote in local elections compared to national elections, dismal though that is too. Local issues and candidates are as close to the bone as you can get in American democracy, the place where your vote counts the most, but fewer and fewer people exercise that right.

Is there a correlation here? As statistics compiled by GRIID demonstrate, coverage of local issues and candidates is minimal, a far cry from the kind of information we need as citizens to make informed votes. This shouldn't be acceptable from the dominant form of communication in our society.

Consider what that means to a democracy.

But this is only one issue. What about children's programming? What about violence on the screen? What about the portrayal of race, class and gender on the airwaves? What about...well, you get the idea.

All of these issues affect the fabric of our community, if that's what we still profess to be. And I hope we do, despite the efforts of the fewer and fewer corporate giants that control what we see, hear and read in this country. There's more to life than investor profits.

I urge you to listen and learn and share tonight, and then exercise your rights while we still have them.

