

**Media Contact:**

Matthew Berry, (202) 418-2005  
matthew.berry@fcc.gov

**For Immediate Release**

**STATEMENT OF FCC COMMISSIONER AJIT PAI**

***On Promoting Broadcast Ownership Diversity***

STARKVILLE, MISSISSIPPI, October 14, 2015.—Throughout my time at the Commission, I have worked on ways for the FCC to foster diversity in the broadcast industry. And yesterday, I had the privilege of visiting three African-American-owned broadcasters in the State of Mississippi. From these meetings, I heard about the opportunities and challenges facing minority broadcasters and gained additional insight into what the FCC can do to help them succeed. I started the day at WLOO, a television station owned by Tougaloo College, a historically African-American college in Jackson. Since Tougaloo College took control of the station, WLOO has upgraded to HD. The station also produces its own content and carries programming created by and for African-Americans. And as a college-owned station, WLOO gives student-interns at a time hands-on training in television production, helping to create the next generation of minority broadcasters.

The station's general manager, Pervis Parker, told me that WLOO's joint sales agreement (JSA) with another Jackson station, WDBD, has been critical to the station's success. Without it, he is not sure that the station would have survived given the College's limited financial resources. And there's no way it would even be considering a long-form news program—something that's on tap for 2016 or 2017. This is why WLOO's staff is very concerned about the fact that current FCC rules would force the station to terminate its JSA by the end of 2016. It could jeopardize WLOO's future.

Next, I visited WFQY-AM, a classic hip-hop station in Jackson. The station is owned by Gerold Smith, an African-American entrepreneur who was born and raised in the Magnolia State. Mr. Smith began working in radio during his college days at Jackson State University. After more than a decade in the industry, in 2012 he was able to fulfill his longtime dream of becoming a station owner. Indeed, he became the youngest radio station owner in Mississippi at the time. The Notorious B.I.G. once said, "You never thought that hip hop would take it this far." But that's what Mr. Smith has done.

During our meeting, Mr. Smith walked me through the challenges of operating WFQY. He also told me how critical WFQY's FM translator was to the station's survival. He said that most people now listen to the station on the FM dial. Indeed, the importance of the translator was brought home to him when it recently experienced technical difficulties and went off the air. Both listeners and advertisers have been contacting him to express their concern—including one such call during my visit itself.

Then, I traveled to URBan Radio Broadcasting in Starkville. This African-American-owned company operates three FM radio stations in Starkville—WACR, WMSU, and WAJV—along with stations in Alabama and Ohio. I met Kevin Wagner, the president and CEO of URBan Radio. Mr. Wagner started his radio career as an employee in Chicago, and he worked his way up to owning stations in the South in the late 1990s. With a focus on serving the listening community, Mr. Wagner has expanded his stations’ reach over the last decade. But Mr. Wagner told me that some of the FCC’s media ownership regulations had made it more difficult from him to get financing to acquire new stations.

URBan Radio’s Starkville stations also provide Mississippi State University students with opportunities to gain experience in the broadcast industry. Indeed, I met one of URBan Radio’s current interns and heard about how her work at the stations is a first step that will help her become a broadcaster in her own right. Today, I look forward to visiting two AM radio stations in Birmingham, Alabama that began rebroadcasting on FM translators last year: WAGG and WAYE. WAGG plays gospel music and primarily serves Birmingham’s African-American community. WAYE is a Spanish-language station owned by Dulce and Maria Rivera, which focuses on serving the city’s Mexican-American community. I look forward to hearing about the impact of FM translators on these AM stations. I would like to thank all of these broadcasters for their hospitality and taking the time to share their stories with me. I came away from my visits in Mississippi with a renewed appreciation for the challenges minority broadcasters face and a renewed determination to fight for policies that help them thrive. That includes the FCC enabling AM broadcasters to acquire FM translators. That means the FCC allowing pro-competitive arrangements like JSAs that can promote minority ownership. And it means establishing an incubator program to make it easier for minority entrepreneurs to enter the broadcast business. I hope that these and other policies find bipartisan support in the months and years ahead.

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**Office of Commissioner Ajit Pai: (202) 418-2000**

**Twitter: @AjitPaiFCC**

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