

**Statement of Patrick Gottsch
Founder and CEO of RFD-TV**

Examining the Competitive Impact of the AT&T – Time Warner Transaction

**Senate Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Antitrust,
Competition Policy & Consumer Rights**

Wednesday, December 7, 2016

My name is Patrick Gottsch, and I am the founder and CEO of RFD-TV. RFD-TV was launched 16 years ago with two charters: serving the needs and interests of rural America, and reconnecting rural and urban America. RFD-TV is an independent programmer that brings rural content to all Americans, not only in rural markets but also in urban and suburban markets throughout the country, including senior citizens. I support the AT&T-Time Warner transaction, and urge its rapid approval.

As an independent programmer, RFD-TV has not hesitated to express its concerns about threats to independent programming and discrimination against rural programming. We spoke out against the proposed Comcast-Time Warner Cable merger, after Comcast made clear its intent to carry only urban-focused programming at the expense of rural America. We took out full page advertisements to protest Verizon's decision to drop us and other rural programmers from its lineup. And our passionate fans have filed over 200,000 comments at the FCC in recent years clamoring for more independent programming, including programming that serves the interests of rural America and senior citizens. After the FCC opened a notice of inquiry into the challenges facing independent programmers, it acknowledged that the "vast majority" of the nearly 36,000 comments it received in that proceeding were from "individuals complaining about the loss of the network RFD-TV from their subscription television package."

While we have not hesitated to speak out loudly against multichannel video programming distributors (MVPDs) who have threatened independent programming, by the same token, we feel compelled to speak out to acknowledge when an MVPD is doing the right thing. AT&T, under the leadership of Randall Stephenson, has made a commitment to expanding its services for rural America, and working to connect rural and urban America. In RFD-TV's experience, AT&T is honoring its commitment. Unlike other media executives, Mr. Stephenson stepped up to acknowledge the importance of serving rural America, and since then AT&T has consistently shown sensitivity to the issues facing rural America and senior citizens. As one recent example, AT&T's new DIRECTV NOW over-the-top service includes RFD-TV in its most basic package, which ensures that consumers across the country will have access to rural-oriented programming.

Based on AT&T's track record, RFD-TV firmly believes that the AT&T-Time Warner transaction will prove to be positive for rural America and senior citizens.

Mergers inevitably will continue to occur in the communications industry. RFD-TV will continue to be focused on ensuring that independent programming can reach its intended audience, and that independent programmers are on a level playing field in obtaining distribution and reaching their fans. This committee should continue to carefully scrutinize each transaction, but it should also give credit where credit is due. And in this case, that means approving the AT&T-Time Warner transaction.

It was William Jennings Bryan who wrote, "Burn down your cities and leave our farms, and your cities will spring up again as if by magic; but destroy our farms and grass will grow in the streets of every city in the country." Now, more than ever, we must all work together to bridge the gap between urban and rural America. It is vital that rural interests be supported, and that urban America and rural America communicate effectively with each other. We should embrace companies that are working to facilitate that communication and break down the wall between rural and urban America. AT&T is one of those companies.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the hearing record. Please let me know if I can be helpful in providing any additional information, or responding to any questions.