Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Anna G. Eshoo
Fourteenth District
California

April 16, 2012

The Honorable Julius Genachowski, Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Genachowski,

I write to express my support for the Commission's proposed rulemaking to bring the broadcaster's public file, of which the "political file" is an important component, onto the Internet.

Requiring disclosure of political advertising sales and the terms of their sale is not novel: Congress and the FCC have done so for decades under longstanding provisions of the Communications Act. I support your proposed rulemaking because it merely brings this disclosure online and into the 21st century. Where technical limitations might have made widespread availability of the public file infeasible in 1950, the failure to do so in 2012 – using the Internet – is inexcusable.

The public file plays a critical role in promoting transparency both in elections and in the use of our public airwaves. Those who argue that digitizing this information creates anticompetitive concerns are overlooking the fact that this information is already available for public inspection, albeit in antiquated form.

There is also no substitute for the information the file holds since the Federal Election Commission (FEC) collects only limited data on ad expenditures, and only as they relate to Federal issues. Today, despite its importance, the public file's information is largely inaccessible to most members of the public, buried in the basement filing cabinets of local broadcasters.

To the extent the requirement to upload information already collected by stations presents an administrative burden, I have no doubt the Commission can craft rules to ease the process for small broadcasters and minimize staff time devoted to the task. Creating an FCC-hosted website for the disclosures, rather than requiring broadcasters to host the information themselves, is an encouraging start, and I support future action to bring the public files of cable and satellite providers online as well.

Thank you for your work to improve transparency for the American people.

Sincerely,

Anna G. Eshoo
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology