



# A LIFETIME OF LEADERSHIP

## Thank You, Gordon Smith

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He has been called “the ultimate statesman.” And in the editorial boardroom at *Radio Ink*, there was never a doubt: the 2021 Lifetime Leadership Award belongs to Gordon Smith.

As he bows out after his 12-year tenure at the end of this year, Gordon Smith, two-term senator, entrepreneur, and attorney, leaves behind a string of accomplishments and a host of acknowledgements as one of the most engaging, successful leaders to ever hold the top position at the National Association of Broadcasters.

Over the years, he has navigated a sea of issues facing the radio industry. Many will tell you that in doing so he has kept broadcasters one step ahead and on task, defending turf and fending off challenges.

Throughout a dozen years of negotiations and deliberations, he has also gained not only allies for the industry but admirers up and down the Beltway and beyond. Over the next pages, you’ll read some of the accolades he has earned from both political colleagues and grateful broadcast executives.

He is also one of the longest-serving NAB leaders. Only Vincent T. Wasilewski and Eddie Fritts held the position longer.

While we bid adieu to Gordon Smith’s leadership at the NAB, we are pleased to know he will continue to work on behalf of broadcasters through 2024 as adviser and advocate.

We wish him well. We thank him for his service to the industry, and we applaud the Lifetime Leadership example he has set. Congratulations, Gordon Smith.

— Deborah Parenti

### **Radio Ink: Why did you take the NAB job back in 2009?**

**Smith:** When I served in the Senate, specifically on the Commerce Committee, I became very aware of NAB and Eddie Fritts, and paid particular attention to broadcasting. I knew as a U.S. senator that my staff wisely budgeted time when I was back in the state to go to radio and TV studios to communicate with my constituents. I had an inherent self-interest in broadcasting. It was important to my role in American democracy. That was my first acquaintance with NAB, and it's been good ever since.

### **Radio Ink: Any surprises when you first came on board?**

**Smith:** Two things surprised me: how many existential threats were coming at broadcasting because of digital technology and the development of the Internet – how much new competition there was for eyes and ears. I didn't fully comprehend before that how much peril broadcasting was in.

I was doubly alarmed when I came aboard and found a great deal of disunity within the association. Literally it was between radio and TV members, between small-market broadcasters and large, even between networks and affiliates on the TV side. Two networks weren't even members of NAB.

Fostering unity and getting harmony in terms of messaging was sort of job one. It was actually accomplished because of the seriousness of the threats against both radio and TV. I made the case that Congress is not going to fix intra-industry squabbles, and we needed to be on the same page with the same messaging if we were going to be effective in Congress.

It was the performance tax that was of greatest alarm when I came on board. I made the case to TV that if they would help with using advertising to defend radio on a jobs theme, radio would use its platform to defend TV, which became necessary a couple of years later on pushing back on the national broadband plan. It worked like a charm, and it fostered unity. It got the two outstanding networks back into membership. Radio very much won a spectacular victory against the performance tax at a time of maximum peril from that issue.

### **Radio Ink: Would you say radio is in more or less peril these days?**

**Smith:** There's always the threat of the performance tax, but I think one of my disappointments is that we've never been able to advance the idea that if you're going to have a terrestrial performance royalty, it must be offset by some common-sense rate on the digital platform, on streaming. That becomes more important as listeners move to the stream, but radio can never accede to just a performance tax on traditional radio on its own without some accommodation that says, "Let's move music forward together."

I am proud we beat the performance tax in every Congress since I've been at the NAB, but also recognize it's still a sword hanging over the industry that is unsettled.

There have also been great progress and opportunities made for the AM band because of the last FCC. Former FCC Chairman Ajit Pai is due some real credit on that in terms of HD Radio on AM. The FCC order allowing for AM stations to voluntarily transition to all-digital service provides flexibility for radio to address interference issues. It enables broadcasters to attract new listenership. I think there's still a place for AM and new tools to provide for its health and strength into the future.

### **Radio Ink: Do you think broadcasters should be concerned that Joe Crowley is now heading up musicFIRST?**

**Smith:** It's a sword hanging over the future of radio. Joe Crowley was an effective member of Congress, and whether he will be an effective outside lobbyist remains to be seen. We'll keep open our invitation to negotiate, but we're certainly not going to cave in to a one-sided demand. We continue to confer great value on the performance community as the best discoverer for new music, the best platform for the discovery of new music. It's necessary for all of radio to stay attuned to this issue.

### **Radio Ink: What kind of year has it been for the NAB – where does the NAB stand as a result of what happened in the last year?**

**Smith:** No one could've anticipated a worldwide pandemic that gutted our

Words cannot begin to express the immense respect I have for Gordon Smith. A true statesman who has tirelessly served the radio and television industry for more than a decade, his outstanding character is one we all can aspire to. He is a kind, decent, and thoughtful individual who cares about others and treats everyone with respect. While it has been an absolute privilege to work with him on the NAB Board, it has been an even greater privilege to call him my friend.

**Caroline Beasley**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Beasley Media Group**

I cannot think of anyone more deserving to be recognized for a lifetime of public service. TV and radio continue to be the lifelines to our local communities, and Gordon has been a fierce advocate for the diverse and local voices throughout the country. On a personal level, Gordon has helped me carve a path to success. I will miss his classy, calm, and powerful voice.

**Trila Bumstead**  
**Owner**  
**Ohana Media Group**



Beasley Media Group CEO Caroline Beasley, former NAB EVP/Radio John David, and Gordon Smith

As a senator, Gordon was a good friend and a passionate advocate for Oregon on a wide range of issues — from fostering new technologies like the Internet to advocating on behalf of mental health. At NAB, he's been an equally effective advocate for the broadcasting industry, including local radio and television in Kentucky.

**Mitch McConnell**  
**Minority Leader**  
**United States Senate**



## **NAB is standing up for local radio stations**

in Congress and at the FCC to ensure broadcasters' ability to innovate and serve local communities. From advocating against a performance tax on local radio to working to preserve local journalism in the age of Big Tech, NAB is fighting for you.

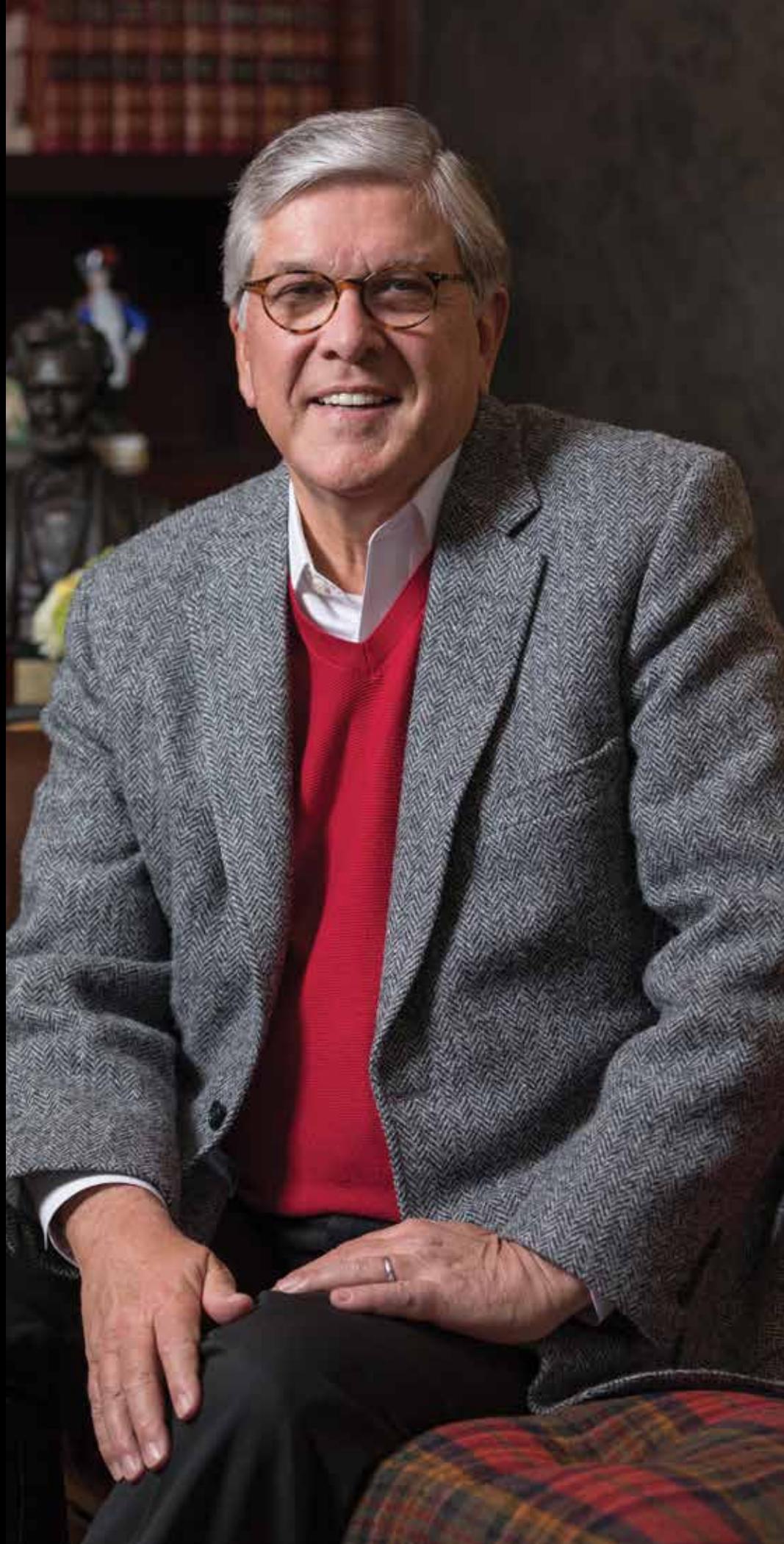
Working together, we can ensure a bright, strong future for broadcasting. Visit [nab.org/membership](https://nab.org/membership) to find out how your station can join us today.



Gordon Smith understands the unique role local radio and television stations have in their communities — keeping listeners informed, entertained, and even safe when disaster strikes. He has been an incredibly effective advocate for broadcasters in small and mid-size markets, where local news and local advertisers define hometowns in Missouri and all over America. I have appreciated his friendship and advice over the years.

**Roy Blunt**

**United States Senator  
Missouri**





Gordon Smith testifies before Congress

programs and finances for the year, but we've been prudent and found ways and means to keep the association going. I think we've been able to add value back to our members, if you think what we've done this past year, including real victories for radio members like fighting against the performance tax and preserving the consent decrees on ASCAP and BMI. Imagine the chaos that would've ensued had we lost that fight.

We've been able to secure reimbursement funds for radio stations involved in the TV broadcast spectrum repack. We recently won a Supreme Court ruling in favor of relaxing limits on media ownership. Of great importance to many of our radio members is that we won COVID relief in the form of PPP forgivable loans, and we got the second tranche, so more radio stations could be included in receiving those funds.

It's been a really busy year under extraordinarily difficult circumstances, but

we've gotten through it and are now in a place to build back the NAB membership in very significant ways for the future.

**Radio Ink: You mentioned the performance tax. What other issues should broadcasters keep an eye on in the coming years?**

**Smith:** It is going to be important that we rebalance the relationship between broadcasting, both radio and TV, and big technology. There are some opportunities coming up in this Congress in which both Republicans and Democrats, for different reasons, are looking with a jaundiced eye at big tech.

All in radio know the kind of bite big tech has taken out of advertising that would normally go to radio and TV. What that's beginning to translate into is the loss of localism and journalism. They represent two very important public policies that need to be preserved. If left to big tech, they will simply continue to

Gordon Smith was tailor-made for this moment in history. No better person could have led the NAB and advocated for the broadcasting industry over the past decade, and our industry is far better off because of his leadership. At a time of transition in broadcasting, politics, and society, Gordon had the right stuff — a very unique combination of strong relationships on the Hill, a passion for local broadcasting and clarity of the challenges we face, deep understanding of the political process, the vision of what needed to be achieved and the will to achieve it, the ability to get things done, combined with a burning desire to do what is right and to serve our local communities. Thank you, Gordon. Your leadership, integrity, vision, and results serve as an inspiration to us all and have set us up for success over the next decade.

**Bill Wilson**  
**CEO**  
**Townsquare Media**



Smith with syndicated personality Rickey Smiley at the 2017 Radio Show in Austin

be in peril. They aren't interested in the localism and journalism that broadcasters do, along with newspapers. The relationship with big tech needs to be high on the list of concerns for radio.

**Radio Ink: Do you think radio and TV should run a campaign to educate the public on what's going on?**

**Smith:** We're actually considering lots of ideas on ways to inject ourselves into this debate between big tech and traditional sources of localism and journalism. There are several pieces of legislation we're supporting – the Journalism Competition and Preservation Act, specifically. There are anti-trust issues involved where we're looking for the best way to inject ourselves. I think both radio and TV realize the relationship with big tech needs to

be addressed, rebalanced, and improved. There's probably no bigger issue for us to play offense on than the JCPA.

**Radio Ink: Why do you think it's important for broadcasters to stay in touch with their local elected officials?**

**Smith:** Your question raises for me what's been a passion ever since I've been at NAB. I was an elected official and realized in personal ways how important broadcasting was to my public service. Every broadcaster should have, as job one, relationships with members of Congress to make the case and ask for the vote. They have a natural platform for educating lawmakers and winning their support for what we uniquely do for public policy and democracy.

We're a vital link in the health of

**Gordon Smith is a leader among leaders. Always kind, a master at the art of getting things done, and a hardened steel resolve. Gordon is a leader other leaders should emulate.**

**David Santrella  
Salem Media Group**

American democracy. It needs some help right now. Survey after survey shows that radio and TV broadcasters are the most trusted source of news. We aren't spinning people. We aren't part of the shout shows. We are digging for the facts and trying to share them as objectively as possible with the listeners and viewers so they can make up their minds. That's a huge role we play in democracy.

**Radio Ink: You mentioned a lot of issues. Are there any you wish you'd gotten across the finish line during your time?**

**Smith:** I think we've played perfectly the fight over performance royalties; however, I do wish we'd been able to find a partner on the other side of the negotiation table to come up with a deal that allows radio and musicians to not only survive, but thrive. Something that advances music on all platforms.

I wished we'd been able to get the telephone companies to include radio FM chips in their products. Most other developed countries require that, we do not. I think that's a real disservice to the American people. I wished we had gotten those issues further down the field and scored some points.

**Radio Ink: Should broadcasters be concerned about anything at the FCC that we may not be seeing in the headlines?**

**Smith:** We obviously look with great appreciation on the FCC that was led by Ajit Pai, but we've dealt with FCCs that have had Democratic majorities in the past and done so successfully. I have no reason to believe that will change. It might be a little harder to get our way and we may have to employ some other resources, friends who support us on Capitol Hill — those friendships exist. NAB is a bipartisan organization. It's very important to have friends in both parties, which we do. We will use those to help us make our case to the Democratic majority that will eventually be in place.

**Radio Ink: Why do you believe Curtis LeGeyt is the right person to succeed you at this time?**

**Smith:** Anybody who knows Curtis knows he is incredibly competent and very collaborative. I have watched from the day we hired him out of Senator Leahy's judiciary staff operate with skill, tact, and effectiveness. Then through this terrible COVID year, as he served as our COO. In that capacity he obviously impressed the executive committee of the board of directors and the larger board. He's earned the job. Given all the discombobulation of this last year, it makes so much sense for many reasons to make this hire internally. It means less uncertainty for our membership. It means more stability for the NAB staff. It's the right move for all the right reasons.

**Radio Ink: If you had a room, door closed, full of all the important radio executives, what advice would you give them on the future of radio?**

**Smith:** Don't undervalue the important place you have in the firmament of American telecommunications, but never assume people in federal power fully understand it. Always be engaged in telling your story every two years. If you don't tell it, if NAB doesn't tell it, no one will.

Look for opportunities to solve problems — just saying no is not always the best strategy. It's important to do deals because if you can't stop bad things, you can shape them so you can win other things. Be open to ideas on how to solve problems so the future remains promising.

The future has to include broadcasting. Its reach, architecture, the public service commitment that's at the heart of every true broadcaster are real and important to our country. Keep earning your place in America's telecommunications because America needs you to win.

**Radio Ink: Why should anyone who is not a member of the NAB become one?**

**Smith:** Every business in every industry feels beset by the government, but few

What a well-deserved honor. Gordon took the helm of NAB at a very perilous time. Our clout on Capitol Hill had seriously diminished, and the infighting on the NAB Board was like a bad horror movie. I witnessed Gordon transition this great organization back to strength with clarity and compassion. He made great, strategic hires, guided NAB staff with calm and command, and handled fractious Board politics like the master diplomat that he is. I'm sure that after 12 years in the U.S. Senate, Gordon was very disappointed to narrowly lose his Oregon Senate seat in 2008. But his loss turned out to be radio's gain, and it's the best thing that could have happened to NAB. So to my mentor, golfing pal, and lover of U.S. history: Congrats on this Radio Ink Lifetime Achievement Award. Good luck to you, Sharon, and the family. Now go enjoy those grandkids!

**Dennis Wharton**  
**Former EVP/  
Communications  
National Association of  
Broadcasters**



With former FCC Chairman Ajit Pai

There are so many good things to say about Gordon that it's hard to narrow down to a few sentences. He came to NAB not as a broadcaster, but as a well-respected, experienced political veteran with a business and spiritual background that fit perfectly as our president/CEO. He respects broadcasting's role in America, and it shows as he represents our interests in Congress and at the FCC. He knows history and he knows the political system, and he makes it work. He is well-liked and respected and extremely deserving of this recognition by Radio Ink, and I endorse the decision.

**John David**  
**Former EVP/Radio**  
**National Association of**  
**Broadcasters**

industries actually have a business that begins with a federal license. Our business starts with a federal license, so the relationship to federal power is absolutely crucial. Every radio executive needs to understand the importance of political engagement in order to keep and win the future.

**Radio Ink: You've never come across as someone who would sit on the porch and watch the grass grow. What are you planning to do?**

**Smith:** My cousin now-deceased Congressman Mo Udall once humorously observed that the only cure for political ambition is embalming fluid. Having said

that, I don't anticipate running for public office again, but I'll always be active in public service in some way.

I have a large food processing enterprise in Oregon that I need to spend some time with. I look forward to putting a higher priority on a lot of things in my life that have had to take a subordinate role.

I am particularly looking forward to being a very involved grandfather. I'm excited about the future and to have good health. There are many worthy causes. I intend to have an active and fruitful retirement, but it's going to be very family-focused.