

Robert M. McDowell

Partner



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Washington, DC

Communications Regulatory
Communications
Congressional Investigations
Digital Media and Entertainment
Internet of Things
Mergers and Acquisitions
Telecommunications and Wireless
Technology
Private Equity
Spacetech and Satellite
CooleyREG

Rob is chair of Cooley's global communications practice group, and he advises telecommunications, media, space technology and satellite clients – including private equity and venture funds – on their most significant regulatory, legal and business matters. As a former commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission and a highly regarded industry leader, Rob has been at the forefront of the most complex and groundbreaking issues facing the telecom-media-tech sector.

Rob was appointed to the FCC by President George W. Bush in 2006 and was reappointed by President Barack Obama in 2009. He was unanimously confirmed both times by the US Senate. During his tenure, Rob led efforts to expand consumer access to spectrum through his work on the two largest wireless auctions in US history at the time. He also played a key role in the 2009 digital television transition, he and led efforts to establish the first federal civil rights rule in a generation by creating a ban on racially discriminatory practices in broadcast advertising, among many other accomplishments.

While at the FCC, Rob worked extensively on several large and complex mergers, including Sirius and XM; Comcast and NBCUniversal; Verizon and Alltel; AT&T and Dobson; Sprint and Clearwire; Verizon and SpectrumCo; and AT&T and T-Mobile. At Cooley, he represents clients on transformative deals before the FCC, Congress, the White House and other regulatory bodies.

Rob's representative matters

- Advised T-Mobile in its merger with Sprint
- Counseled Gray Television in its acquisition of Raycom for \$3.6 billion
- Advised Ribbon Communications on cross-border investments
- Represented TWN before the FCC regarding the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund
- Advised Iridium Communications in its acquisition of Satelles
- Counseling T-Mobile on strategies regarding spectrum auctions and license acquisitions
- Representing Gray Television in its appeal of an FCC enforcement order before the US Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit
- Advised Microsoft and its Airband project to secure regulatory approval of technical spectrum proposals to enable the creation of a broadband ecosystem using unlicensed television channels, or "TV white spaces," to help serve unserved and underserved portions of the US

- Counseling Iridium Communications in its regulatory spectrum advocacy to support its global voice, data and navigation satellite services
- Helping clients navigate policy and advocacy processes before regulatory bodies, the executive branch, Congress and strategic third parties
- Represented Gray Television in its amicus appearance before the US Supreme Court in *Prometheus v. FCC*
- Advising Sixth Street Partners on FCC proceedings and spectrum arbitrage opportunities
- Counseled GI Partners in its acquisition of Rise Broadband
- Advised private equity funds managed by affiliates of Apollo Global Management in the \$3.484 billion acquisition of the broadcast television businesses of Northwest Broadcasting and Cox Media Group, CMG's radio station portfolio, CoxReps, the United States' largest national television rep company, and Gamut, a national advertising business

Rob is an advocate for internet freedom, serving on the official US diplomatic delegation to the 2012 World Conference on International Telecommunications and exposing an international bid to regulate vital aspects of the internet through multilateral treaty-based organizations. Rob authored an op-ed in The Wall Street Journal opposing multilateral internet regulation that led to a resolution passed unanimously in the House and Senate, as well as the ultimate defeat of the international bid at a treaty negotiation in Dubai later that year.

Rob often is called upon for speaking engagements and frequently appears on TV and radio. He has written opinion pieces for many publications, including The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post.

Education

William & Mary Law School JD, Order of the Barristers, 1990

Duke University BA, cum laude, 1985

Admissions & Credentials

Virginia

District of Columbia

Court Admissions

US Supreme Court

US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit

US Court of Appeals for the First Circuit

US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit

US Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit

US Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit

Rankings & Accolades

Super Lawyers: Washington, DC, Rising Star (2024)

Best Lawyers in America: Media Law

Chambers USA: Telecom, Broadcast & Satellite – District of Columbia (2020 – 2026)

Chambers USA: Space – Nationwide (2025 – 2026)

Consumer Electronics Association: Digital Patriot Award

Latinos in Information Sciences and Technology Association: Chair Award

The Legal 500 US: Leading Lawyer in Telecom and Broadcast (2021 – 2025)

Media Institute: Freedom of Speech Award

Minority, Media and Telecom Council (MMTC): Everett C. Parker Award

National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters: Power of Urban Radio Award

Phoenix Center for Advanced Legal and Economic Policy Studies: Jerry B. DuVall Public Service Award

Sports Fan Coalition: Most Valuable Policymaker

Memberships & Affiliations

William & Mary Law School Foundation, trustee

McLean Project for the Arts, former chairman and board member

The Hudson Institute, senior fellow

The Potomac School, former member of the board of trustees

Shared Spectrum Company, board member

Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy, former member of the board of visitors