

Action Coalition for Media Education
Board Member: Alison Brzenchek
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Canton, MI 48188

Commission's Secretary
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
9300 East Hampton Drive
Capitol Heights, MD 20743

CG Docket No. 02-311 - Biennial Review 2002 Comments -

Dear Chairman Powell:

The Action Coalition for Media Education (ACME) is significantly alarmed about the current policy initiatives the Federal Communication Commission is considering related to media ownership regulations. ACME is a coalition comprised of hundreds of educators, parents, students, researchers, and activists, all of whom are committed to promoting media education and preserving democracy. We believe the current market conditions are prohibiting the FCC from protecting the localism, independence and diversity that are central to media democracy; and further deregulation would escalate the massive concentration of money and power, leading to additional deterioration of democratic media.

ACME Board Members were pleased to learn that the FCC has decided to hold a public hearing in Virginia. As Commissioner Copps has stated in the past, there is no issue more "fraught with serious consequences for the American people than the media ownership rules." Consequently, we urge the FCC to support Commissioner Copps in his efforts to facilitate hearings throughout the United States of America.

Since it's inception in 1934, the FCC has been charged with seeking public participation in decision making and protecting the "public interest". Public involvement, since the September 12, 2002 release of the Notice of Proposed Rule Making, has been minimal, at best. The FCC is evaluating policy considerations, about a venue that has the "near ubiquitous, pervasive power to completely alter the beliefs of every American..." the potential elimination of these regulations is being called, "the most radical view of media consolidation that any democracy has ever supported..." while in addition being "exclusively driven by ideology and business interests..." this is all according to, past FCC Chairman Reed Hundt. With concerns such as these being voiced by a past FCC Chairman and similar concerns being voiced by current FCC Commissioner Michael Copps, it would be potentially disastrous to move forward with out an educated and informed public debate.

Because of corporate media consolidation in the wake of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, news outlets have devoted scant attention to the current round of hearings. We are now in a situation where the responsibility the media has to inform the public is in direct conflict with the indisputable financial gains facilitated by further deregulation. This illustrates our point: the need for vigorous and widespread public debate on the question of further relaxing caps on media ownership.

The omission of coverage speaks directly to how the excessive consolidation and vertical integration of the mass media threatens media democracy. How can the media industry claim, "news gathering operations are independent of their corporate interests" when in the midst of major policy evaluation coverage is practically nonexistent? The public, unless they search out the few independent media sources left, does not hear about media ownership. The three major news networks reach 20-25 million households; cable news channels reach an additional 3 million---these are the main sources of information for many Americans, and they are not covering this debate. Not coincidentally, these players would reap financial benefits with these proposed changes in policy.

Media conglomerates are desecrating American democracy; they have put their financial interests ahead of their obligation to inform the public. Mass media providers have received federal funds, subsidies, monopoly rights to spectrum or cable; the acceptance of these public assets indicates incumbency to utilize them to inform American citizens about all pressing public issues.

ACME believes the business interests of commercial media have gone unchallenged for too long. The FCC must facilitate meaningful public policy debate related to media ownership regulations to preserve the definition of "public interest," which has been approved judicially and congressionally, "to promote diversity based on independent ownership designed to expand competition, meet local community needs, and protect the viewing/listening public's First Amendment rights to hear and be heard."

In closing, when discussing media and democracy the late, Senator Paul Wellstone stated the following, "global media corporations wield enormous influence over the formulation of public policy. Yet they often have direct economic stakes in the outcome of our public policy debates. What's more, ordinary citizens have almost no say in the way these conglomerates operate. Yet, we know that what's good for global media corporations is not necessarily good for America."

We respectfully ask that the commission do what is good for all Americans.

Sincerely,

The Action Coalition for Media Education

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