

**Statement of Becky Brenner  
Operations and Program Director, KMPS-FM and KYCW-AM  
Field Hearing on Media Ownership, Seattle, Washington  
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Good morning. I'm Becky Brenner, Operations Manager & Program Director at KMPS-FM, 94.1 and KYCW-AM 1090, the country radio stations here in Seattle owned by Infinity Broadcasting, a division of Viacom.

I know that this event today is all about the debate going on in Washington DC, and involves the questions of who can own what media and how many. I have to admit that I only have a limited knowledge of the facts surrounding this debate. But I would like to share with you two things I do know an awful lot about: radio and Seattle.

Radio has been my life-long passion and career. At the age of 17, I was involved in local broadcasting at Merrill High School in Merrill, Wisconsin. When I moved to Oshkosh to attend the University of Wisconsin, I immediately applied for and won a news internship at two local commercial stations, one an AM and one an FM. After three months the stations hired me as a news reporter. Three months later I was hired to do overnights and then quickly moved to doing the afternoon drive, live on the full-service Country AM station. I also recorded a show for the FM station each day before I went live on the AM. I continued in this position in Oshkosh radio until September of 1982, when I applied for and was hired to do on-air from 7 pm to midnight at KMPS in Seattle.

So, Seattle has been my home since then, for the past 21 years. I was actually born here and lived here until I was 9, so I have the privilege of saying I am a native. My grandparents, most of my aunts and uncles and cousins live in this area. I have lived in Burien, just south of Seattle, since 1984. I am an active member of St. Francis of Assisi

parish, where I volunteer at both the school and the church. I have been a member of the Puget Sound Radio Broadcasters Association. I volunteer as pledge talent for our local public television station. And I have hosted the local United Cerebral Palsy and Arthritis foundation telethons.

Seattle is a great place to work in radio. And it's awfully competitive. There are 57 commercial radio stations owned by 27 different owners. Back in 1996, before the ownership rules changed, there were 28 owners. As you can see, then, the relaxation of the radio rules has not really affected Seattle. Of course, we face additional competition from satellite and Internet radio and the hundreds upon hundreds of audio choices. I know there are some who might minimize the competitive role of online radio services, but we know that people at work, at home and in the car are turning in large numbers to these new media instead of to broadcasting. An Arbitron study released last week shows that 75% of the total population now has access to the Internet from any location. The study states that "Internet broadcasting is rapidly becoming a mass medium with an estimated 103 million people or 44 percent of the total population having used Internet audio or video." All of these developments create demand for the consumers time. We feel the pressures of this competition everyday at our radio stations.

As the Program director, I am responsible for everything you hear coming out of the speakers. The Program Director has final say over the music, the on-air talent, the station imaging and the commercial production. The Program Director takes creative input from the music director, the marketing director, the production director and the on-air personalities. It is a team effort to make a station sound great!

I have read articles claiming that radio formats today are not as varied as they have been in the past. I don't agree with that statement. In Seattle, there has been an explosion of formats since 1996. There were 19 then and 30 now. And 17 of these are brand new formats. The rules changes have helped radio in our city. For example, in 1996, Seattle had twelve Country stations all vying for the same audience. There were multiple AC stations and multiple Rock stations all playing similar music because their owners felt they could win the ratings/revenue battle in these formats. In my experience, however, there is usually one clear leader of a certain format and the other stations pick up the scraps. Today, citizens in Seattle can choose formats ranging from All News, to Sports Talk, Mainstream Country to Classic Country, Super Hits of the '60s & 70's to Album-Oriented Rock and Adult Alternative. As group owners work to make every station more successful in their own right, many niche formats emerge to provide even greater diversity on the radio.

Sure, there is probably some overlap of songs among certain formats, but that does not mean diversity of music has decreased. Rather, it means that music cannot be placed into neat little boxes. Take Shania Twain, Faith Hill and the Dixie Chicks, for example. While they all have strong country roots, they obviously appeal to a wide cross-section of listeners. That is why the Dixie Chicks and Shania were asked to perform at last year's Super Bowl. Folks who ordinarily tune into an Adult Contemporary format and those who tune into a Top 40 formats want to hear Shania Twain, Faith Hill and the Chicks. In an era where artists plumb the depths of their shared experiences and cultures and borrow from other cultures, music is bound to defy neat little format boundaries. That is why the cable channel CMT: Country Music Television

has had such great success with their "Crossroads" feature. They have paired Travis Tritt and Ray Charles, the Dixie Chicks and James Taylor, and Alison Krauss and Steven Tyler for very successful shows. Right now on Country radio, Kid Rock and Sheryl Crow are getting played. The song is what really matters. We can play Country Rock, Country Pop, Country Bluegrass and Traditional Country. All of this provides a great deal of variety and diversity. Our main goal is to serve our listeners and give them what they want. Apparently, radio is doing a pretty good job of giving the listeners what they want. Another recent Arbitron study found that radio listeners today are very pleased with the programming choices available to them. More than two-thirds, or 69% of those surveyed, said their local stations do a very good job of providing a wide variety of programming. And nearly 75% of radio listeners think that their local stations do a very good or good job of playing the music they like.

I would hate to have the City of Seattle, the State of Washington or the federal government telling me what songs I have to play on KMPS. In fact, I wouldn't be happy if Infinity told me what to play. My two stations, along with Seattle stations KZOK-FM (Classic Rock format), KBKS (mainstream CHR format), and KYPT-FM (the '80s & More format), are owned by Infinity. But each one of our stations has its own program director, its own music director, its own on-air talent and its own staff who run the station and stand ready to respond to citizen concerns and requests. I can tell you that no one at Infinity has ever dictated to me a playlist, or even a song, that must be aired. What happens on our station is controlled by us, because Infinity knows that serving Seattle and the Puget Sound Area is good business and that no one knows better how to serve the Northwest than those of us who live here.

Here is a good example of local control and listeners driving decisions. In 2001, our sister station KYCW, which served a niche audience with classic country music from 1950 through 1990, decided to change its format to Extreme Talk. The listeners went nuts, deluging the station with emails and phone calls, urging a return to the old format. The will of the local listening public prevailed, and in a very rare occurrence in radio yesterday or today, the station returned to Classic Country 1090.

On KMPS and KYCW we work hard to service the listeners by playing music from artists who are signed on to major labels, medium labels, small labels and some with no label at all. The goal is to find and establish hit songs that then become familiar to the audience as their favorites. This means we listen to between 20 and 30 singles every week. Because there are only 60 minutes in the hour and we want to play a balance of new, recurrent and gold music, we can add two or three songs a week. That means there are a great many songs and artists that are never heard. This weekly routine has been the same since I got into this business in 1977. It has not changed.

Because the music business is so competitive and cutthroat, we do look for ways to expose local artists. The KMPS morning show airs a segment called "Music From Our Own Backyard," which features Seattle-area musicians. On a recent segment, we played the music of local country musician Myron Thomas Kline and of a local R&B band called Bump Kitchen. This band was so pleased with the airing of its song "Big Ol' Bones" that it thanked KMPS on its website, noting that "we were blown away at all the entries [on our site] from people who heard us on KMPS!" Our morning man, Ichabod Caine, has been instrumental in exposure for local groups like The Coats and local artists like Duncan Shadrack and Jake Jefferson.

We try to get these local musicians regional and national attention by occasionally sending the material of promising local musicians to Nashville labels. And this past fall, KMPS worked with the USA Network TV show “Nashville Star” to find the best country singers and songwriters in Seattle. KMPS held three local events toward this goal, with more than 175 local contestants vying for the opportunity to be a regional winner. We featured the 10 local finalists on our morning show.

Local radio has long given back to the communities in many ways. Since 1989, KMPS has conducted an annual two-day radiothon, raising millions of dollars, to benefit St. Jude’s Children’s Research Hospital. For the past seven years, KMPS has run the week-long “Basic Necessities Drive,” where the station chooses five different communities and five local charities to solicit supplies for, including things as seemingly basic as shampoo, diapers and blankets for a women’s shelters for the homeless. From June to September every summer, KMPS broadcasts live from local community festivals, pumpkin patches, parades and fund-raisers. Being owned by Infinity has made it easy to partner with our sister stations in helping our neighbors in a big way. This coming May, for example, KMPS and KBKS will hold a day-long radiothon to raise money for the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. Last summer KMPS hosted Countryfest with ticket sale proceeds benefiting pediatric oncology research at the Fred Hutchinson Center. KBKS hosted their concert to benefit Aids research at The Hutch. And every Friday, KMPS names a “Student of the Week,” recognizing an outstanding local student who has been nominated by the community with cash, CDs and station merchandise. For over 25 years our news director Don Riggs has produced a local public affairs program called “Introspect Northwest.” Every Friday he features a list of community events during his

newscasts. KMPS not only serves our six-county metro, we cover communities from Vancouver, Washington in the South to Vancouver BC to the North and all cities from the Cascades to the Olympics. It is a huge responsibility.

Our station always stands ready with late-breaking news to inform its listeners, especially in times of local and national emergencies. For example, in late February 2001, a major earthquake struck Seattle. The five Infinity stations in Seattle responded by providing local news and information, and we aired eyewitness accounts from our listeners who called in to share their experiences, as well as the advice of local emergency service officials. All stations broke into their scheduled programming to devote time to the best local news and information available.

In conclusion, I would just like to say that in my experience, consolidation has provided us with greater resources and a chance to "raise the bar" for the smaller stations who previously did not have the revenue or the ratings to compete successfully. In our own group, KZOK, KBKS and KYPT have been more successful than they were under their previous ownership. The ability to share great ideas across the country and promote people within our own company has increased exponentially. All of this has occurred while still allowing us to run our radio station like a hometown, locally owned station. If we weren't focused on that, we would not be as successful as we are.

Thank you.