

Comment opposing any relaxation of media ownership rules.

THE ISSUE

From a May 14 story in thehill.com:

In Senate hearings, Senator Dorgan asked Frank Blethen, publisher of The Seattle Times, what he thought would happen if the expected deregulation of ownership rules went through.

“I think we will see the beginning of the end of democracy,” Blethen replied. “It’s going to be a sad day for America if that happens.”

I couldn’t agree more. There is no public support at all for weakening media ownership rules. A preliminary tally of the rules received by the FCC showed that fewer than 1% supported weakening them.

MICHAEL POWELL’S OBFUSCATORY TACTICS

Michael Powell’s response to the overwhelming public opposition is to hide behind the courts. A federal court ruled that some of the ownership rules were “arbitrary and capricious”, and sent them back to the F.C.C. The court didn’t say that the rules were wrong, it just wanted better justification. So Powell says he doesn’t want to hear anecdotes from activists, instead he needs empirical evidence to show that the rules are necessary for the public good.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

However, sometimes persuasive scientific arguments can be made simply.

1) Is there water on the moon? We’ve looked at it, we’ve been there, there’s no water on the moon except maybe a little ice at the poles.

2) Is there information in the press for citizens to fairly evaluate the so-called Free Trade Area of the Americas, a massive trade agreement on the scale of the European Union (at least in economic terms) which would affect every American and which is scheduled to be signed and implemented by 2005?

NO! THERE IS ESSENTIALLY NO INFORMATION ABOUT THE FTAA IN THE POPULAR MEDIA. OR IN THE MEDIA AT ALL.

Most Americans have never even heard of the FTAA. The information isn’t there. I know because I’ve looked.

3) And regarding the issue of imminent changes of the ownership rules: Does the public know this is happening?

NO! Because the media is already too big, and they aren’t covering the story because they stand to gain from the public’s interest. A poll showed that less than a quarter of the American public knew about the proposed changes earlier this year, well after Michael Powell had already wanted to put the issue to bed.

Is there water on the moon? No, unless you really know where to look.

Is there substance in our media? A Berkeley journalism professor who was defending our system said you can learn about the truth if you read six newspapers plus the foreign press.

Commissioners: Even the rules which have been questioned by the courts should stand. The courts merely sought further justification for them. That justification exists: it has been articulated in a 300-page legal brief full of

empirical studies published by the Consumer Union (the publisher of Consumer Reports), the Media Access Project, and the Center for Digital Democracy.

Sincerely,

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