

Via Fax

May 30, 2003

The Honorable Michael C. Powell
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Powell:

RE: Ex Parte Notice. MB Docket No. 02-277, MM Docket Nos. 01-235, 01-317, 00-244. In the Matter of 2002 Biennial Regulatory Review – Review of the Commission’s Broadcast Ownership Rules and Other Rules Adopted Pursuant to Section 202 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996; Cross-Ownership of Broadcast Stations and Newspapers; Rules and Policies Concerning Multiple Ownership of Radio Broadcast Stations in Local Markets; Definition of Radio Markets.

The outcome of the media ownership proceeding is one of your defining moments at the Commission. At this final hour, I strongly urge you to protect the cornerstone of our democracy – media diversity – with strong structural limits.

I reiterate the key points that CWA has made throughout this proceeding.

1. Diverse media ownership is essential to diversity of viewpoint and competition for news reporting. This is the foundation of our democracy.
2. Despite the growth of cable and the Internet, the data provided to the Commission makes clear that most Americans today get their news, especially their local news, from the daily newspaper and local television.
3. In most local markets, there are only four to five mass media local news outlets: the monopoly newspaper and three to four broadcast television stations.
4. Therefore, the Commission should not allow newspaper/ broadcast combinations and television duopolies (much less triopolies) where post-combination there would be fewer than eight independent local mass media voices.

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CWA has further urged the Commission to require newspaper/broadcast combinations and local television station combinations to maintain separate news and editorial staff to ensure news diversity, even as the Commission allows combinations for business efficiency. It is not too late to add this requirement to the draft order.

Finally, I strongly urge the Commission to require annual reporting by newspaper/broadcast combinations and local market television combinations of service quality measures. Such measures would include employment figures by occupational category, as well as quantitative measures such as number of hours of news and information programming (for television), size of newshole (for newspapers), and cross-programming (for television duopolies), and ad rates. This would allow the Commission to track the impact of any rule changes on news and public affairs programming.

When the Commission adopted price cap regulation of interstate telecommunications carriers in the early 1990s, it also adopted measures requiring service quality reporting. Similarly, the Commission must require reporting so the Commission and the public can analyze the impact of these rule changes.

As you have said, this proceeding will profoundly change the American media landscape. We are all watching the Commission on this one.

Sincerely,

Morton Bahr
President

cc: Commissioner Michael Copps
Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein
Commissioner Kevin Martin
Commissioner Kathleen Abernathy