

386 Boyer Court
Marshall, MI 49068
jalp@internet1.net
May 30, 2003

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

phone 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) / fax 1-866-418-0232 or 1-202-418-0188

general e-mail: ***fccinfo@fcc.gov***
Chairman Michael K. Powell: ***mpowell@fcc.gov***
Commissioner Kathleen Q. Abernathy: ***kabernat@fcc.gov***
Commissioner Michael J. Copps: ***mcopps@fcc.gov***
Commissioner Kevin J. Martin: ***kjmweb@fcc.gov***
Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein: ***jadelste@fcc.gov***

Subject: 2002 Biennial Review – Review of the Commission’s Broadcast Ownership Rules
(MB Docket Number 02-277)

I am not employed by any communications company in any medium. I am writing to you, individually and as a body, as a concerned citizen. I urgently request that the FCC take no action and make no decision to ease or erase the current rules limiting conglomerated ownership of the media until and unless fully spelled-out proposed changes to these rules are first published far and wide, and the public is given a full, free, fair, and open chance to see them and comment on them. If you are determined to act now, I urge that you err on the side of the people – and retain or strengthen these rules to protect diversity in public speech in this country.

I agree with the Office of Advocacy of the Small Business Administration that it is difficult to comment in significant depth or detail, or even very closely to the point, on unwritten rules. If there are no explicit terms set, that makes it hard to judge the impacts – though it is incumbent on FCC to do so, and to give the public the chance to do so as well, as the Office of Advocacy pointed out in disputing the sufficiency of a simple declaration that the rules would have no impact on small businesses.

I must oppose the adoption of any rules, or changes to rules, if they are not spelled out. Given that the rules changes now under discussion are not concrete, and may nevertheless be voted on, any further comments from me must take a rather philosophical approach.

We are all familiar with the simple Latin phrase *E pluribus unum* . . . “out of many, one.” It is a part of the foundation of this country’s political philosophy – and of our recognition of the value of diversity.

In the study of biodiversity, it is known that having more varieties of organisms is healthier for long-term survival – of a species, or of an overall ecosystem. The same is just as true – if not more so – for media diversity and the survival of a democratic sociopolitical system.

But how do we get from many to one? Unity imposed from above cannot be relied upon to foster democracy. Democracy must come from the ground up – and grow from the many into a more powerful, more perfect union. Unity can give us power, but only once diversity gives us strength to temper that power and make it flexible, able to respond to all conditions and see all views.

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I know you are all too aware that the media are a big business – among the biggest, in fact. But they are not just businesses. They compete – and trade – in the marketplace of ideas. That market must be kept free and fair; we cannot afford to let it slip into a monopoly, or fall to a cartel . . . to forget the long-term interest of the nation and its people while we look for a temporary advantage to a few. The good of the nation demands that you focus on the future – and the people of, by, and for whom you work. This is true of all media, and all media “markets”. It is particularly true for the broadcast media, where companies are profiting directly from use of the people’s airwaves and have a concomitant responsibility to serve the public interest. That responsibility, that duty, you share as well . . . and I urge you to remember it.

Let me offer you another comparison to consider. It has been postulated that religious freedom in a cultural complex is inversely proportional to the strength of the strongest religion. This view can be applied equally well to freedom of speech in the media. Just as A’s right to swing his arms freely must stop somewhere short of B’s nose, my freedom of speech means nothing if nobody can hear what I say because it gets drowned out by the amplified volume of someone else’s speech – or of the top half-dozen voices trying to outshout each other.

But perhaps I am already being drowned out. I am not a major contributor – though I do have some candidates I support. I am not a media mogul, with a vested interest in lifting ownership caps that my head has already outgrown. I am just an American citizen. But in fact you should not recognize any higher rank, or admit the possibility that there is any party with a more powerful interest, than the rank and the interest I share with millions of other Americans.

Those of you who attended the few, poorly-promoted public hearings held by the Commission on this incomplete proposal saw that the overwhelming majority of public comments were against loosening the controls on media monopoly. If you cannot wait to approve new media-ownership rules for the next two years until after you have actually written them down and shown them to the American people, if you must act now on what has been said so far, then I ask that you heed their voices and either retain the current limits or strengthen them. That is the right direction to go if your aim is truly to strengthen American democracy – to live up to the motto *E pluribus unum*.

Sincerely,

John Anthony La Pietra
386 Boyer Court
Marshall, MI 49068
jalp@internet1.net