Sinclair Broadcast Group's recent actions have illustrated the peril to localism caused by trends toward media consolidation. The public channels need to retain news and editorial control that is 1) locally responsive, 2) resourced to perform investigative journalism, and 3) is careful to provide for many spectrums of views.

In the Sinclair situation, decisions of local affiliate stations were overridden by dictums from a distant top management regarding the requirement to show all or segments of Stolen Honor: Wounds that Never Heal. Local stations are forced to comply. When local staions have no choice but to surrender to the owner's editorial and content demands, the public loses, advertisers lose, and the media becomes more tainted and discredited. Sinclair persists in this in spite of national attention, advertiser defection, and claims a First Amendment right.

Sinclair uses the public airwaves free of charge, and is obligated by law to serve the public interest. But when large companies control the airwaves, we get more of what's good for the bottom line and less of what we need for our democracy.

When the locus of news gathering and reporting and editorial control is not local and not locally responsive, Democracy loses a key and critical benefit of the fourth estate. Citizens need the media to be the watchdog of government instead of lapdog. Instead of something produced at "News Central" far away, it's more important that we see real people from our own communities and more substantive news about issues that matter. Media management's First Amendment rights on a public airwaves require balancing and monitoring and careful announcing as such, or we face a situation where perhaps 5 corporations determine what free speech is ok to present. A number of indications suggest the Sinclair editorial policy is to air negative stories about candidate Kerry and positive ones about Bush, regardless of whether facts justify this, whether journalists agree or local perspectives differ.

Sinclair Broadcasting also refused to air the ABC Nightline edition in which the names of the 1000 military who died in Iraq were solemnly read a few months back. They chose to deny viewers this opportunity for conveying a national recognition of losses to families and a solemn commeration for the fallen. Their management perceived such a reading as an embarrasment to the administration. This denial of coverage at a major milestone seems as much a stolen honor as the attempt to present an imbalance attack on the honor of a decorated, well documented, veteran running for office. There is no similar offering reviewing the incumbant's military career or matching counterpoint opportunity offered Kerry.

After initial criticism, Sinclair opted to not not show the entire Stolen Honor show, just the most damning segments in the context of a panel discussion. Sinclair has responded to heated national criticism by saying they provide by balance through their plan to provide a 30 minute postshow 'talking-heads' panel in which Kerry is invited to face. along with a riled up audience, hostile panel members. This seems like a cynical set up for a mob scene worthy of Jerry Springer or Rush Limbaugh. Kerry merely showing up to defend himself results in lots of news about the incredible hostility he faced, even if he competently addresses it. Kerry not showing up generates a 30 minute panel discussing Kerry as cowardly avoiding the incredible hostility waiting to face him, and would be 'news' as well. Either way, even greater polarization results and the fires of subrational hatred are inflamed further, in a time when considered and deliberate reasoning is most sorely needed over platforms and policies. Sinclair's management objective appears to be the creation of an inflammably hostile situation to infuse doubt in millions about Kerry. Many feel this 'event' should be classified as an in-kind political contribution to the Bush campaign and questions are being raised to the FEC as well as FCC.

When media owners seek even looser regulations on media ownership concentration and have a vested interest in maintaining an administration favorable to their wishes, and then use their content control as a 'First Amendement' right to attempt directly discredit another candidate, we have an intolerable situation and prime example why we need to strengthen media ownership concentration rules, not weaken them. This unbalanced electioneering attempt shows why the license renewal process needs to involve more than a returned postcard. Renewal needs to focus on both the local

station and on the few owners entrusted with our public airwaves, for head to toe evaluation. By allowing this sort of railroading of media electioneering, the FCC is creating wounds that never heal in terms of even greater distrust of the media. The only media citizens trust is one in which local ownership, local accountability, local investigative power flourishes.

Thank you.