

Dear Commissioners:

I attended the meeting on media ownership at USC yesterday, but due to the large number of people making comments there was not time for me to speak.

Thank you for inviting panel members who spoke about issues and events not covered by the mainstream media.

I commuted from Costa Mesa to attend the meeting because I am alarmed at what media consolidation has done to the quality and availability of news in this country.

The Los Angeles Times used to be a decent newspaper, but now in addition to the predictable decline in coverage of local news (did anyone really think that a company based in Chicago would give two hoots about what's going on in Orange County?), national and international news coverage is also a disgrace.

For example, last week, an article about a woman who was charged over \$300,000 in penalties for failure to pay fees at a local toll road was relegated to the back pages of the 'local' section of the Times. The piece omitted any discussion of how often penalties of this sort are assessed or the question of the legality of levying fines that are over 300 times greater than the cost of the initial service on a privately-owned, taxpayer-supported road.

This poor coverage – if a story is reported on at all – is typical of the Times' token effort at providing local news.

National and international news is often just as difficult to access. On issues as vital as the war in Iraq, the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, and electoral fraud, the mainstream media have ranged from government mouthpieces to selective in their coverage – or completely silent. To find out what is going on in the U.S. and the world, I have to search the Internet for small news organizations that have no corporate sponsors or read British and other international news.

Aside from the humiliation of reading horror stories about U.S. actions in the foreign press (it's like hearing devastating news about a family member from a friend or stranger), voluntary censorship and spin among the media with the widest audience affect the ability of all U.S. citizens to make informed decisions on public policy.

News consolidated in the hands of a few huge corporations cannot benefit the public. For corporations, such as the Tribune, that have their fingers in so many pies, providing news is – at best – of secondary importance. A company owning a news agency that also has interests in the sale of arms will have a conflict of interest regarding stories that could potentially reduce profits.

Chairman Martin mentioned the concern that newspapers were having trouble competing with the Internet. This is not just because people prefer the Internet over newspapers. It is because mainstream newspapers are all owned by the same handful of people who are all printing basically the same thing – and it isn't real news. People who like gossip and hearsay are still buying the National Enquirer in droves. Those of us who really want to be informed have been forced to seek alternative sources.

I miss the days of sitting down with the Times and reading it from cover to cover, and would gladly renew my subscription if I could get accurate, insightful, courageous, and timely news from them.

But until media ownership rules are changed to either pre-1996 levels or something similar, large corporations have no incentive to report news that serves local interests – or even the American public at large – and independent companies can't compete.

Rules allowing further media consolidation are out of the question in a free and democratic society. True freedom of the press will require enforcing existing ownership laws and reinstating rules that allow small, independent, and local media organizations to flourish and reach large audiences. Only then can we begin to undo the damage done in the last 10 years.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Remington