Federal Communications Commission
Broadcast Localism Hearing

City Council Chamber
Municipal Plaza Building
103 Main Plaza
San Antonio, Texas

Wednesday
January 28, 2004

Testimony Prepared
By

Lydia Camarillo
Vice President
Southwest Voter Registration Education Project

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Mr. Chairman, Commissioners, distinguished guests, members of audience, and members of the press, thank you for inviting me to be part of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Hearing on Broadcast Localism.

My name is Lydia Camarillo; I am Vice President of the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SVREP). SVREP is a national civil rights organization founded here in San Antonio, in 1974, by our founder the late Willie C. Velasquez to increase the participation of Latinos and other ethnic communities in the democratic process. Since its inception, SVREP has registered over 2.2 million Latino voters throughout the Southwest and recently the Southeast; or, as we like to refer to our service area: America's Sun-Belt states. This election cycle SVREP will ensure that 2 million Latinos register to vote and are mobilized for the November elections.

Let me begin by stating that I am pleased to be part of this important hearing to discuss issues of localism that have an impact on the voice of democracy, the representation of ethnic and minority voices, the allocation of the airwaves time, and more specifically, the impact of consolidation of ownership on democracy and the representation of communities of color.

Hopefully, my testimony will also provide recommendations on how the FCC can respond to the lack of Latino (and other ethnic communities) representation on the broadcast airwaves of America.

The Latino population is the fast growing electorate in the country. Only a generation ago, Latinos were a politically powerless people; our interest were disregard; our views dismissed; our cultures disrespected; our participation discounted. Today, the Latino community is participating in the American democratic process like never before. Allow me to emphasize that our numbers continue to grow, and as a matter of fact, we are the youngest electorate in the nation. Interestingly, Latinos voter registration has grown from 2.7 million Latino voters to 8.3 million nationwide - a phenomenal growth of 163%. Moreover, the 38 million Latinos living in the United States, which represent more than 12% of

the United States population and 6% of the nation's total electorate, have become an undeniable and unavoidable presence in American politics.

In states like Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Florida, New York, Illinois, New Jersey, Nevada, Ohio, Idaho, Washington, Texas and Oregon, the Latino electorate represents a significant share of the total vote. In Texas alone, 2.5 million Latinos are registered to vote, representing 14% of total share of the vote.

For the Democratic primary presidential elections, Latinos will represent 25 to 30% of the total share of the vote in Texas this March 9, 2004. Likewise, Latinos in California will represent 20-25% of the total share of the vote in the March primary elections. In New Mexico, the Latino vote will represent 40-45% of the share of the vote in the primary elections. (Projections prepared by the SVREP with data from the William C. Velasquez Institute (WCVI) and the United States Census).

In fact, contrary to conventional wisdom, primary elections in New Hampshire, Iowa and South Carolina will not determine a front-runner in the democratic field. Latinos in Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, California, Illinois, Florida and Texas will likely determine the democratic presidential nominee through their primaries in February and March.

It is why we are convinced that Latinos stand at a crossroads in American politics - a crossroads that holds many historical implications. The overall decline of participation levels amongst the American electorate, combined with the record growth of Latino participation, promises to change the values of America democracy. Also, and most importantly, the rising number of Latinos and Latinas being elected to political office promises to change the face of our government.

But in spite of the record growth of the Latino electorate, mainstream America and Latino communities have not yet understood the impressive gains made by Latinos politically for many reasons - one being that the newsrooms of America are not telling the complete story. Or, if our stories are being told, they are not being told by Latinos, and even more rarely are they reported by Latinos. Rarely is the complete and accurate Latino story reported.

Fortunately, the Latino story is being told by Latino-owned newspapers across the United States. In San Antonio, for example, Latinos can count on La Prensa to provide news that covers their issues. It is a rare example where complete story is guided by Latino interests, since the media outlets is owned by Latinos. Similarly, La Opinion out of Los Angeles is owned and governed by Latinos, thus its coverage is extensive and its depth of understanding of the Latino story comes from the Latino perspective and history. Unfortunately, the number of Latino-owned newspapers are small, and even fewer Latinos own radio stations and televisions.

Historically, we can argue that newspapers were never controlled by the government; this was a result of the protection of first Amendment. In other words, anybody could start a newspaper. This is not the case for radio and

television because broadcasters had to broadcast over the public airwaves, and to prevent people from interfering with each other's signals a control and monitoring process was developed with the passage of the Radio Act of 1927 and the Federal Communications Act of 1934. These government regulations, governed by the FCC, provide for individuals to free license to broadcast over the public airwaves, but in return theses broadcasters have an obligation and duty to give the public access, representation and coverage. Public airwaves belong to the people and as such broadcasters have a moral obligation and duty to represent the public interest, needs and convenience in its boardest sense.

The use of public airwaves should also mean that the widest possible dissemination of news and information from diverse voices, perspectives and communities must be part of the American culture, and the FCC, therefore, has a responsibility to protect the public interest. It is why we feel it is necessary that these interest must be extended to Latinos and communities of color.

The number of television stations owned by minorities has declined in the past three years from 33 to 20. In San Antonio the top ten radio stations are owned by three conglomerate companies Clear Channel, Cox and Univision. Furthermore, Clear Channel owns a stake and influence of Univision.

The issue is not whether broadcasters are being local to a greater or lesser degree, but rather whether the lax ownership rules hinder the democratic process and excludes community interest and representation.

Television and Radio owned and controlled by Latinos and communities of color ensure that the Latino story is told complete with accuracy; further more, it ensures that Latinos report the Latino perspective in America.

Diversity of ownership breeds competition and competition breeds better journalism and diverse perspectives in the news. It is why ownership guarantees diversity of news reporting; reporting by reporters that reflect the growing ethnic communities of color. In other words, news reported by local communities ensures the public interest of those communities.

Since 1996 America has witnessed the decline in quality broadcasting as major radio conglomerates buy up most of country's stations. During this time, the largest companies went from owning 40 stations to 1200, and United States citizens listened as their quality of news-reporting and programming declined. Programming decisions are made at the national level not the local level. Local news teams and international news bureaus were scrapped or downsized, guaranteeing less coverage on local and important issues. In communities like San Antonio, were the population of Latinos is significant, little coverage on important issues that matter to this community are covered in a way that truly reflect their interest.

For example, I doubt that the majority of the Latino community in San Antonio is fully aware that 2.5 million Latinos are registered to vote in Texas, and that Latino electorate make up an estimated 15% of total share of vote make up the Latino electorate in any given election. In our opinion, facts such as these are important information that can help stimulate an even greater participation from

within our ranks, thereby fortifying the democratic process. Or, we have wondered, could it be that such titillation from a more localized and responsible media would not be welcomed by some of the powers that be?

There is little doubt that journalism and news reporting shapes the political landscape of American democracy. Without our fair share of minority ownership and control, America's communities of color and Latinos will continue to be absent in the airwaves of America.

It is one of the reasons that am here to testify on behalf of the millions of Latinos who make-up a significant and growing part of this country; but I am realistic enough to know that I can only represent those who believe as I do, or as SVREP and the WCVI believe, that "deregulation of the public airwaves, hurts America's democracy, voices and public interest. And, it will undoubtedly promote the continued exclusion of the voice of Latinos who work hard, pay their taxes, and live in America." Without local owners and local newsrooms who better reflect America's changing population, the media industry will continue to be disconnected from its communities. The bigger companies become, the less likely they will feature local talent, cover local news reported by reporters who look like their communities.

Obviously, ownership matters. It ensures corporate responsibility; diversity of creativity, art, culture and vision; promotes diverse reporting, ensures that local news takes front stage governed by local issues and its communities which then resonates at the national levels.

I therefore, respectfully ask and suggest that the FCC can support the local communities by ensuring that:

1. Prevents broadcast Television companies from buying newspapers in the same communities in which they have television stations.
2. Limits the number of local radio stations that anyone broadcaster can own in a signal market, depending on how many stations exist in the single market.
3. Limits the number of local broadcast stations that any one broadcaster can own to systems serving 35% of the televisions households in the United States.
4. Prevents one entity from owning both a radio station and a television station in the same market.
5. Prevents one broadcast network from owning another broadcaster network.

Finally, I would like to thank you for giving us this opportunity to share with you our views and to request that you honor a tradition of excellent journalism; better put, it is a tradition of complete, accurate and reflective of its communities by insuring that consolidation does not injure the quality and value of good news reporting.

What I have emphasized, in other words, is that the public airwaves should continue to be part of our values and tradition supporting America's people; all people, including communities of color and the Latino community.