

F.C.C. HEARINGS CONCERNING
MEDIA CONSOLIDATION

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Remarks by
Mario Proenza

My name is Mario Proenza, I've been an independent producer working in this industry for over 20 years. The job of a producer isn't easy, especially when you're young, just starting out. But the promise of the job is that as you develop your skills and develop your contacts, the job, while still not easy, at least gets easier as time goes on. Unfortunately, that has not proved to be the case in this day and age.

My specialty is Spanish-language programming, and in the early days of my career, the Los Angeles marketplace in this field was thriving. There were several independently owned stations where one could sell programs, such as Channel 34, Channel 52 and Channel 22. Telemundo purchased Channel 52 and Channel 22, and then, of course, NBC purchased Telemundo. This year, Univision, which owns Channel 34, has been put up for sale, though I don't believe a deal has been finalized yet.

But producers like me have already felt the effects of consolidation. More and more, these stations are purchasing programming from their own networks, rather than from anyone with an independent point of view. The "Old Boys Network," which was never really a factor when the stations were competing with each other, has infected the Spanish-language marketplace. Now, most programming doesn't come from across the spectrum of independent producers—it comes from a select circle of in-house producers, who owe their position to the fact that they create programming that reflects a corporate brand and ethos, rather than the audience it's broadcast to.

It's become a closed system, and increasingly, the only way an entrepreneur like myself can make a living is as a producer for hire, accepting fees that get smaller each year to put together programs that you have no investment in, no passion for. It doesn't serve producers, and it certainly doesn't serve the diverse communities who once relied on independent programming to reflect their unique values and needs.

The days when an individual entrepreneur could hope to make a mark in entertainment and control his own destiny are rapidly coming to an end. I can think of no better way to choke off the spirit of entrepreneurship that built this industry—still the source of our nation's most popular exports—than to continue down the path of consolidation that we are presently on.