

Dear Commissioners. Thank you coming to Tampa Florida to hear our views about independent media.

The Tampa Bay area is blessed to have independent media and therefore many people in our community appreciate the importance of the issue you have brought up for hearing tonight.

I speak tonight on behalf of one of those rare independent media outlets, as President of the Board of Directors of WMNF 88.5 FM, community radio for the Tampa Bay area. We present eclectic music and independent news and public affairs. We bring the listeners the music and news they support with their donations. We are not answerable to shareholders or advertisers. We are responsible to our listeners. They want independent media.

WMNF first went on the air in September, 1979, the result of a few years of hard work by a small group of dedicated volunteers who went door-to-door raising money for Florida's first community radio station. The call letters stand for: Member-sponsored Non-commercial FM.

WMNF continues to be volunteer-powered and listener-sponsored, providing the listening community with non-mainstream news, views and public affairs programming. We have 10,500 generous listener-supporters and our arbitrons show a regular listening audience of 100,000!

Independent media is important to us. For true democracy to work, people need easy access to independent, diverse sources of news and information. Our listeners are well educated and well informed. We give them information to make up their own minds about the issues of the day.

We carry a variety of locally-grown as well as nationally syndicated news and public affairs programming:

WMNF Evening News provides in-depth state and local coverage, plus national and international perspectives, on weekdays 6-7pm. Many local stories that would be ignored find coverage here. RadioActivity is a daily call in show with host Robert Lorei who confers with guests and listeners about issues in the local and global community.

On alternating Mondays, we have a doctor who talks about alternative health and a Sustainable Living show.

The Women's Show, an eclectic feminist/womanist radio magazine including interviews, film and book reviews, announcements, news, speeches and documentaries by and about women, airs on Saturdays

On Sundays we have a six hour block featuring voices of African Americans, the first two hours are Gospel followed by four hours of African-American oriented public affairs programming. Other African American voices are heard throughout the week with blues, jazz, soul, poetry shows.)

We follow that with the Sunday Simcha which runs the gamut in Jewish entertainment and information

And where else could the Sunday Simcha coexist with True Talk, and Arab Muslim talk show with voices from the Islamic community.

On Tuesdays we present Latino 54 with music and news for the Latin American community

Lastly, *Out in the Open*, presents issues for gay, lesbian, and bisexual communities in our area. WMNF carries syndicated programming from other independent media sources such as NPR news, *Fresh Air*, *Democracy Now* with Amy Goodman, *CounterSpin* from media watch group FAIR, *Radio Nation* from *The Nation* magazine, and *Explorations* with noted nuclear physicist, Michio Kaku. We also find time for a great deal of diverse and eclectic music which is the mainstay of our programming.

This, in our view, is what a healthy media looks like. Honest, independent, interesting, uplifting, enlightening and interactive.

But the last two decades have seen the opposite trend in American: unprecedented corporate media consolidation and stifling of community voices. Just six corporations dominate the U.S. media. These corporate media outlets are legally responsible to their shareholders to maximize profits and have no legal or perceived ethical obligation to the communities they serve. Even U.S. "public" media outlets accept major funding from major corporations and are not truly independent. Every Corporation for Public Broadcasting board member is appointed by the White House and confirmed by the Senate.

Both corporate and US public media have had difficulty facing up to issues that challenge their monetary and political interests. However, because WMNF is mainly through contributions from listeners and does not accept advertisers, our independence has enabled us to discuss issues that have difficulty being heard on corporate media. In the 1980s we discussed the Iran-Contra scandal for nearly 18 months before it was picked up by the mainstream media. In the run up to the Iraq war, we carried discussions questioning the presence of WMD in Iraq and about the faulty intelligence and predicted insurgency. None of these issues came as a shock to our listeners although they appear to have "surprised" many corporate media outlets. The credibility of these media outlets is subject to question because they own defense contracting subsidiaries or are otherwise beholden to the current political office holders. A free and healthy independent media must be prepared to challenge the powers that be.

Corporate media is also cutting back on journalistic costs, as if these were optional. They have discovered that broadcasting opinions and partisan talking points is cheaper than investigative journalism.

Only on noncommercial secular media sources such as WMNF do you see real discussions about the issues rather than talking heads shouting opposite views. On WMNF we have Christians Muslims and Jews sitting down to engage in conciliatory dialogue about understanding each other and solving problems. We do not try to boost our ratings by appealing to the lowest common denominator or fanning the flames of religious hatred or racial prejudice.

In conclusion, I urge you NOT to scale back the remaining rules against media consolidation. American citizens own the airwaves. The FCC should be working to increase independent media voices, particularly in noncommercial broadcasting. Even in the upcoming opening for new noncommercial stations, it appears the rules have been written to favor the new stations going to

religious broadcasters. These rules should also be reexamined because that is just media consolidation in a different form.

I believe the future of our media is THE ISSUE of our times. It affects our ability to resolve all the other issues. Just look around the world today and see what media consolidation has wrought. The need for a dramatic change in direction is urgent and clear.