

Honorable Commissioners,

Over the course of the FCC's public hearings about the proposed relaxation of media ownership rules, an overwhelming majority of testimony talked about how America depends upon a free and open media and how a diversity of voices gives the public the information it needs in order to make well-informed decisions as they participate in our democracy.

I propose that the FCC's vote in this matter be postponed in order to facilitate a more careful evaluation, as proposed by Senators Lott, Dorgan, et al, in the "Media Ownership Act of 2007 (S.2332), introduced on Nov 8, 2007. I also propose that the FCC postpone its decision on media ownership, which appears to be targeted for December 18, 2007, or earlier.

I make these proposals because I believe that the discussion should be expanded to include the upcoming 700mhz wireless auction and Net Neutrality. The 700mhz band is essentially a new form of "airwaves" and has the potential of being dominated by a small number of large communications carriers - analogous to the issue driving the media ownership discussion, because, potentially, powerful communications carriers will be in a position to control the content brought to Americans.

In 2003, communications carriers in the US were permitted by the FCC to build new networks without being obligated to rent them to third parties (counter to the original mandate of the Communications Act of 1996, which Chairman Martin pledged to uphold, in his comments at the Seattle media ownership hearing on November 9).

By contrast, in Europe, this is not the case. In France, at least six companies compete side-by-side on France Telecom's network to deliver broadband TV (IPTV) - over France Telecom's network. This example of robust competition is no longer practiced in the US. These competitors carry some content in common but much of their content is unique to each of the service operators.

Closed networks, on the other hand, whether they are fixed-line (copper or fiber), or wireless (but hopefully, not the 700mhz band), create the possibility of censorship. Already, it is a reality at AT&T, which has changed its subscriber contract to allow AT&T to kick subscribers off its network, who disparage AT&T. Other instances of carriers trying to control the content that their subscribers are putting over their networks are also being documented.

So I encourage the FCC to include the telecommunications carriers and the Net Neutrality issue in its deliberations over media ownership. The lengthening of the commentary period to 90 days, as proposed by S.2332, can and should be used by the FCC to reflect on these additional areas. For the FCC to make its decision on or before December 18 simply not allow enough time to consider these complex issues together.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.

Sincerely,
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