

CHRISTINE O. GREGOIRE
Governor

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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

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TESTIMONY OF GOVERNOR CHRIS GREGOIRE

BEFORE THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

NOVEMBER 9, 2007

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

I'm Chris Gregoire, Governor of the State of Washington. Thank you for coming to my state on this important topic.

Today, I urge you to take a broad public-interest view of the issues you are considering. These regulatory decisions are not solely matters of business interest. I fervently believe the airwaves are public property. Owners who use them have a strong obligation to the rest of us to maintain that use in the public interest.

You last looked at this issue in 2002, and I wrote you, as Attorney General, with my deep concerns about the FCC's efforts to accelerate the already rapid trend toward consolidation in the media. Those concerns are no less on my mind today. As Governor, I continue to be opposed to further concentration of media ownership through consolidation of the media. Such concentration stifles creativity and content. It narrows perspectives available to each of us as citizens, and it is unhealthy in a society that rests on principles of equality and diversity. I find it ironic that in an age with so many new ways for people to communicate – and so many ways to exercise the beauty of Democracy – we face the very real threat that these new ways will be controlled by a few.

Since 1995, there are 40 percent fewer TV-station owners due to consolidation. Three media companies own all of our cable news networks, and two companies serve 40 percent of households getting cable TV. Just one company now owns nearly 1,200 radio stations across the country. Before 1996, no company could own more than 40 stations nationwide.

And I'm not just talking about newspapers, TV stations, and radio stations. Ownership of what we can hear, view and say is concentrating in key chokepoints such as Internet content and phone transmissions. A handful of companies now dominate the top Internet news sites.

We need competition, not concentration. We need diversity, vitality, and local perspectives. Democracy depends on a thriving market place of ideas. It depends on a healthy menu of political discourse, culture, and arts. Do we really want to concentrate control of this market place into the hands of a few? I can tell you, I don't, and I don't believe Washingtonians do either.

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What happens if a single owner doesn't like what is being said on TV or through the newspaper or Internet? Will this owner engage in censorship? That's the problem. The possibility of censorship makes people lose confidence that their voices will be heard. We already have a problem with distrust in far too many of our major institutions in this country – we don't need media added to the list simply through consolidation.

If our means of communication is controlled by a few, what's to stop them from blocking our artists, musicians, grass-roots political organizations, and others from the doorways needed to reach their audiences? How will the next great author get published? How will the next great band be able to leave a garage in West Seattle for a worldwide audience? How will photos, or video, documenting injustice be seen widely enough to spark a response?

This is a problem, both real and perceived. Concentration of media ownership – in all its evolving forms – is a real problem. It's a problem for me, and for Washingtonians, who live and work in creative, expressive and innovative communities from Spokane to Seattle, and Vancouver to Bellingham.

I ask you to ensure that our citizens have access to multiple sources of information and perspectives. Thank you.