

AS AMERICANS across the nation were celebrating the holidays, a federal agency was tying a bow on a gift for big media conglomerates. To avoid public scrutiny, the Federal Communications Commission used the holiday lull to propose rule changes that would allow greater media consolidation in big cities. A vote by the FCC could come any day now.

The rule would make a bad situation worse. In 1983, 90 percent of the American media was owned by 50 companies. Today, 90 percent is controlled by just six corporations: General Electric, News Corp., Disney, Viacom, Time Warner, and CBS. Now the FCC is proposing more consolidation. The proposed new rules would let one corporation in the top 20 media markets own a major newspaper, two television stations, and up to eight radio stations, and provide Internet service.

More media consolidation, or what the FCC calls cross-ownership, would result in less local control, fewer outlets offering differing viewpoints, and less ownership diversity.