

Dear Sirs:

In the late 1920s, the Federal Radio Commission (FRC), the forerunner to the FCC, called on hundreds of independent radio licensees to justify their right to exist. These small stations were often non-profit, community-focused, locally financed alternatives to commercial, for-profit affiliates signing on with NBC and CBS. Under lobbying pressure, the FRC made a fateful decision to side against these small providers and to align the "public interest" with large, deep-pocketed corporate providers. The decision forever altered the face of US media and society. My research and that of others has led me to conclude that the FRC's decision negatively shaped our contemporary media environment. The FRC did not defend independent voices or multiple access to the powerful tools of mass communication. The public's right to an open communications environment to serve our democracy was not robustly defended. Alas, we understand the consequences of the FRC's actions more clearly in hindsight. Much of today's electronic public sphere has been shown by scientific research to be prone to manipulation and/or constraint imposed on views or opinions contrary to the private corporations and interests that were awarded control of our public airwaves in the last century. Today, the FCC is again at a crossroad. The direction you take could decisively define the future of the Internet as a public resource upon which citizens depend. I urge you to remember your own history and the effects of past decisions. Please do not confuse corporate interests with the public's interest as I believe the FRC did years ago. I urge you to stoutly DEFEND the principle of NET NEUTRALITY to ensure that the Internet can remain (as radio and TV have not) a space for broad-based, innovation, competition, and diverse participation by producers both large and small. I believe this is a measure of a public interest standard the FCC would do well to promulgate. I would be happy to furnish you with my research on this issue should you wish to contact me. Thank you for your stewardship of our precious public communications resources and for recognizing the urgency of keeping the Internet free to all. Sincerely, Derek W. Vaillant, Ph.D.