



We Want OUR Air Waves

On June 2, the future of media diversity will once again be in jeopardy when five Federal Communications Commission appointees vote on the further relaxation and possible elimination of media ownership rules. The outcome will affect every consumer of media in America, in addition to media professionals and artists. The last time this happened was after Congress passed the 1996 Telecommunications Act. What ensued was a media consolidation frenzy in which 10,000 radio and television employees lost their jobs, Clear Channel went from owning a few radio stations to over 1,200, and media corporations began serving canned programming to distant communities they couldn't see or hear. The homogenization of news, information, and entertainment is a direct consequence of media consolidation, severely affecting localism, diversity, and competition and undermining basic democratic principles. For those concerned about these issues, you do have a couple of friends on the FCC. Commissioners Michael Copps and Jonathan Adelstein are traveling around the country and holding public field hearings much to the chagrin of FCC chair Michael Powell, who reluctantly held just one in Richmond, Virginia after receiving an unprecedented 15,000 email comments from concerned citizens. Turnout at these hearings has been strong and fiery, but nonetheless limited in size and scope. And for a logical, evidential reason: the network media blackout. Copps is appalled that only one TV network has covered this critical issue, which he says is "unmatched in importance and will have a

formative impact on the fundamental values and virtues of the democratic system." And this one time was at 4:30 in the morning. Media activist groups like Seattle's Reclaim the Media, Santa Cruz's Media Watch, Philadelphia's Prometheus Radio Project, and New York's Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting have been working hard to educate people on these issues, and the independent press has done a good job covering the hearings and imminent June vote. But Copps believes the ownership rules will not see the kind of national debate and analysis he's hoping for until the networks start covering the issue. Both Copps and Adelstein say these deregulation rules will fundamentally alter the media landscape. If ownership rules are loosened or eliminated, the major TV networks will be permitted to acquire other networks, large media companies could buy both TV and radio stations in the same market, and newspaper and broadcast outlets would be able to purchase each other. Media Watch believes the FCC is moving toward "complete privatization, meaning the rights of citizens in a democracy could be totally erased and corporations would own and control all media systems." While the official public comment period is closed, many, including Copps, are still urging people to write letters and make phone calls. Copps is also reminding the public that this is the "people's property" and the FCC is supposed to be acting in the public interest.

- Catherine Komp

For more information

on the issues and how to submit comments to the FCC, visit:
www.reclaimthemediamedia.org
www.prometheusradio.org
www.mediawatch.com
www.fair.org/activism/fcc-call-action.html

Email addresses

for the five FCC Commissioners:
FCC Chair Michael Powell
at mpowell@fcc.gov
Commissioner Kathleen Q. Abernathy
at kabernat@fcc.gov
Commissioner Michael J. Copps
at mcopps@fcc.gov
Commissioner Kevin J. Martin
at kjmweb@fcc.gov
Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein
at jadelste@fcc.gov

Additionally, there are a number of senators on a communications subcommittee who looking at these issues and considering the impact of hasty decisions, despite Bush administration insistence to push a vote through. Contact information on these representatives can be found at:
<http://commerce.senate.gov/about/membership.html>.