



# NEWS

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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## **COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS EXPRESSES “ALARM” AND “DISAPPOINTMENT” WITH FCC’S MEDIA CONCENTRATION DECISION**

Commissioner Michael J. Copps said today that he was “disappointed and alarmed” by the Commission’s refusal to provide adequate opportunity for public participation in its potentially far-reaching review of media concentration rules.

“We’ve asked the public to analyze six separate media consolidation rules. We’ve asked them to sift through twelve studies that many groups claim are inadequate. We’ve asked them to suggest what other areas of this issue need to be explored. And we’ve asked them to do all this in a media landscape that has changed dramatically over the past decade. Yet we provide a mere 60 days to do this. The last-minute addition of 30 days fails to even come close to solving the problem the FCC has created.”

At issue is the FCC’s review of rules that seek to protect localism, independence, and diversity in the media. These rules, among other things, currently limit a single corporation from dominating local TV markets; from merging a community’s TV stations, radio stations, and newspaper; from merging two of the major TV networks; and from controlling more than 35% of all TV households in the nation.

The FCC is required to seek public participation before it eliminates these rules. The Commission recently released a dozen studies for the public to review as part of this process. It withheld the data used in these studies, however, until releasing parts of it today. Public commenters complained that the comment period allowed by the FCC denied them the ability to participate meaningfully. Just as unreasonable, according to these commenters, is the fact that the clock on the comment period has been running even while the underlying data was unavailable.

“At stake in this proceeding are our core values of localism, diversity, competition, and maintaining the multiplicity of voices and choices that undergird our marketplace of ideas and that sustain American democracy,” Copps continued. “With such important values at stake, we ought to give parties the time to provide detailed data, granular evidence and studied analysis. I am disappointed in the extreme and alarmed at the prospect of forging ahead to dismantle the limits and caps before we fully understand the effects of such action.”

“We must give the public time to conduct essential additional research. The FCC studies fail to answer critical questions, such as:

- “If we eliminate our remaining media concentration rules, what will be the effect on the localism, diversity, and independence that have traditionally undergirded the democratic process? This fundamental and obvious question remains unaddressed.
- “As part of this, what does the massive consolidation of the radio market and the current state of radio quality and diversity tell us about what will happen if we eliminate our remaining rules? And, how much news and public affairs programming was broadcast in the years immediately before and after elimination of FCC radio ownership rules?
- “What effects have recent mergers, radio consolidation, and TV duopolies had on the personnel and resources devoted to news, public affairs, and public service programming, and on the output of such programming? Will eliminating our rules result in a crisis in these areas?
- “Do newspapers and co-owned broadcast stations carry similar viewpoints more frequently than independent newspapers and broadcast stations? If so, and if we eliminate our rules, what are the implications for democracy and debate in America?
- “How do consolidation and co-ownership affect the media’s focus on issues important to minorities and to the objective of diversity?”
- “What are the effects of new technologies on the consolidation issue? Digital broadcast, for example, will provide existing station owners with the ability to multi-cast several programs simultaneously. This alone augments their influence. What are the effects of this on competition?

“These are just a sampling of issues that could be addressed by commenters if they have adequate time, and only some of the questions left unanswered by the FCC studies. I’m sure others could provide a much longer list.”

“We are under no mandate to resolve these issues by a date certain. We must place making the right decision ahead of making a hasty decision.”

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