

**REMARKS OF COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS
FCC PUBLIC HEARING ON MEDIA OWNERSHIP
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Good morning and welcome. Thank you all for braving the weather to take part in this important event. Those of you from Washington have heard me say that, for me, no issue pending before the Federal Communications Commission is so important as the decision on whether to eliminate or significantly change our media concentration protections. I say that because what we decide will have a formative influence on how our media will look for many years to come. I believe that fundamental values and democratic virtues are at stake – things like localism, diversity, competition and maintaining the multiplicity of voices and choices that undergird our precious marketplace of ideas and that sustain American democracy. And at stake is the quality and type of the entertainment that we and our children watch and hear. So this is really important work that we are doing today. And I think that,

despite Mother Nature and other challenges, we have top quality participation today. So let's roll up our sleeves and get to work.

I think that we should have two goals today. Proceeding on an assumption that some in Washington find hard to believe, all expertise does not reside within the I-495 Beltway. Our record needs more breadth than the capital can provide. So our first goal in coming to Richmond is to talk with members of this community and state and to tap local expertise to help us make the right decisions and have a record of factual depth and granularity that the courts will accept in reviewing what we do. Secondly, I hope we can raise the awareness in Richmond that something important is going on at the FCC, something that each person here has a stake in, something that every consumer, every citizen, should know about.

I'm frankly concerned about consolidation in the media, and particularly concerned that we are on the verge of dramatically

altering our nation's media landscape without the kind debate and analysis that these issues so clearly merit.

Why am I concerned? I don't believe that we yet know the implications of our actions. We do have some experience to learn from – and that is what happened to radio after Congress and the Commission changed the rules of the game seven years ago.

Many believe that the loosening of ownership caps and limits that took place then created real problems in radio. We'll hear more about this on today's panels. Arguably, consolidation also created some economies and efficiencies that allowed broadcast media companies to operate more profitably and may even have kept some stations from going dark and depriving communities of service. But the consolidation went far beyond what anyone expected. Conglomerates now own dozens, even hundreds – and, in one case, more than a thousand – stations all across the country. More and more of their programming seems to originate hundreds of miles removed from listeners and their communities. And we

know there are 34 percent fewer radio station owners in February 2003, than there were before these protections were eliminated. The majority of radio markets are now oligopolies. And all this in only seven short years!

It raises serious questions. Media watchers like the Media Access Project, which is here today, Consumers Union, and Professor Robert McChesney argue that this concentration has led to far less coverage of news and public interest programming. The Future of Music Coalition in its multi-year study finds a homogenization of music that gets air play and that radio serves now more to advertise the products of vertically integrated conglomerates than to entertain Americans with the best and most original programming.

So, should we eliminate, or substantially change, the protections that remain for television, cable, and newspapers? Before we can make that decision, we need to better understand the

current media landscape and the implications of eliminating concentration protections. Today we know far too little to make an informed decision. Not only do we not have all the answers. We haven't yet teed up all the questions. Let me list just a few questions the studies don't answer.

- What is the likely *prospective* effect on localism, diversity, and independence of TV, cable, radio, and newspapers if we eliminate our protections, especially given our history with radio consolidation?
- How much news and public affairs programming was broadcast in the years immediately before and after elimination of FCC radio concentration rules?
- What effects have recent media 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? How about the effect on the creative arts? 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? The one FCC study is criticized as insufficient.
- How do consolidation and co-ownership affect the news' and arts' focus on issues important to minorities and to the objective of diversity? What are the effects on children?
- Is there a relationship between the rising tide of media consolidation and the rising tide of indecent and low-quality programming on the airwaves?

- How are advertising and small business affected?

The list goes on and on. Today hopefully we can begin to address some of these questions. We need answers to them before I can feel comfortable about making an informed decision. We need a diversity of input into the Commission on these issues that goes beyond anything we've ever had before. We need to hear from stakeholders of every stripe – and, when we're dealing with the media, which is so central to our lives and our democracy, every American is a stakeholder. One thing's for sure – each of us is going to be living with the results of these decisions for a long time.

While the participation of business representatives is essential, so is the input of consumers, labor, educational and religious, minority organizations, and Americans who have never heard of the FCC. We can pretend that these folks read the *Federal Register* and can afford the lawyers to participate fully in

our inside-the-beltway decision-making. But we'd be kidding ourselves. This decision is too important to make in a business-as-usual way. We need America's buy-in, and we need your help answering these questions. That is why I have put so much emphasis on outreach to those I call non-traditional stakeholders who have traditionally lacked a voice at the FCC. That is why I've been pushing so hard for hearings.

Something tells me this hearing will not disappoint me and we'll walk away from here knowing some facts and having some perspectives that just wouldn't have floated into us in Washington. So I'm ready to listen and learn.

Lastly, I want to note that all of us here today – from the Chairman and the FCC, to media advocacy groups, academics, and industry – are interested in doing what's best – together – for the American people and the American consumer. I note with sadness that Fred Rogers of Mr. Roger's Neighborhood died today. Here

was a man who really used the media to serve the public interest, and his example would remind us what we're all working for – TV, radio, cable, newspaper and Internet that uplifts and informs. We have some extraordinary people who have made real effort to debate this issue today. That means a lot to me. I know that we're all after the same thing and that we can work together to do the best thing.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this hearing. Thanks to Dane Snowden and his fine team and thanks to our panelists. And to the audience which came.