

**REMARKS OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS
PUBLIC INTEREST, PUBLIC AIRWAVES COALITION
WASHINGTON, DC
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Thank you, Gloria, for your kind introduction and, even more, for continuing to serve the public interest as you did with such dedication at the FCC.

We're all gathered here today because we share deep concern about what has happened to our media. Concerned about the too-powerful role of a few huge media conglomerates that increasingly control both the content and the distribution of the entertainment, information and news that we get. Concerned that this narrowing control is homogenizing our entertainment and dramatically diminishing our democratic dialogue. Concerned that Big Media is not fulfilling its role—or pulling its weight—in our society.

In this election year when so many important issues confront us, we see dramatically less news coverage. From 1996 to 2000, coverage of even the Presidential race on the network evening news dropped by one-third. The average Presidential candidate sound bite in 2000 was 8-9 seconds. In the 2002 election, over half of the evening local newscasts contained no campaign coverage at all. Coverage of Congressional, state and local races is even worse. I read the other day that many Americans likely saw more prime-time entertainment on a single night than they saw election coverage during an entire campaign!

We need America's broadcasters to step up to the plate and correct this deplorable mess. Commissioner Adelstein has made some really good suggestions on these issues. The Public Interest, Public Airwaves coalition has put forth more good ideas. I was proud to be present at their unveiling. Some broadcasters are committing to air more candidate-centered speech and public service announcements this year—but not enough of them. Wouldn't it be nice to see every broadcaster in this country step up to the plate and designate the rest of this election year as the "Campaign for America" and devote some truly meaningful time to it. And I don't mean just a few minutes here and there, but time commensurate with the tough challenges that confront every citizen in 2004. The issues are war and jobs and health care and deficits and consumer well-being... yet those charged with using the public airwaves for the public good can't get serious about covering what's at stake?

If the majority of Americans are not getting what they should out of today's media, minority groups are faring even worse. Their interests, needs and issues rarely make it to prime-time. They've lost jobs in the industry, they own almost none of it. The great strength of this country *is* our diversity. Diversity is not a problem to be overcome. It is an opportunity to be developed. And our media have an obligation to reflect this diversity and to nourish it.

That's not all. We see fewer broadcast hours of programming for families and

children. We see local talent and local creativity driven to the sidelines. We see vanishing opportunities for creative artists. Local musicians can't get airplay on local stations. Independent programming is being run out of prime-time. These trends undermine the quality of entertainment that springs forth from America's creative genius—and they cause serious job losses for thousands of workers, from creative artists to technicians. What we are getting from Big Media is a smaller America.

In spite of the tidal wave of consolidation that drowned radio after 1996, the FCC charged ahead last June to make things even worse with its decision to unleash the same kind of Clear Channelization on the rest of our media.

Fortunately, that ill-advised and sorry decision galvanized millions of Americans across this country. Concerned parents, creative artists, religious leaders, civil rights activists, labor organizations, young people, old people, even independent broadcasters and many, many others stood up in never-before-seen numbers to reclaim their airwaves.

Their representatives in Congress answered this call. The U.S. Senate has voted to overturn the FCC decision in its entirety and over 200 Members of the House of Representatives have asked the House Leadership for permission to vote on the same resolution of disapproval. So far, they have been denied that vote—a denial of democracy that should worry us all.

And just last month, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the FCC's media concentration plan was legally and procedurally flawed. So we have now heard from the court, the Congress and the American people that that FCC got it wrong when it tried to unleash even more consolidation. It is clear that we need to start over on these rules and this time make it our goal to protect the people's interest in the people's airwaves.

Now is not the time for more delay through an appeal of the court's decision. The Commission has a second chance to do the right thing. And, for Heaven's sake, this time let's include the American people in the process instead of shutting them out. I have asked Chairman Powell to set up a series of ownership hearings around the country starting right away. We don't have time to waste on this. But it's been almost a month since I asked and, so far, no response.

Now *is* the time for a rededication of our efforts. The good news is that, for now, we have checked the majority's mad rush to consolidation. But remember the rules have been returned to the very Commission that devised them in the first place. We could still end up with rules every bit as bad as the ones that have been returned to us. So we have a lot of work to do. But think about what you have already accomplished. Thanks to your efforts, the debate about the future of our media will never be the same. Thanks to your efforts, we have the best chance in our generation to settle this issue of who will control our media and for what purposes—and to resolve it in favor of airwaves of, by and for the people of this great country. Let's vow today to make it happen.