

**REMARKS OF  
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DIGITAL TV: SHARPENING THE FOCUS ON CHILDREN  
WASHINGTON, DC  
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Thank you, Children Now, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Psychological Association for holding this important conference and for the opportunity to make a few brief remarks about how our young people are faring in the face of America's new Big Media environment. The answer is not nearly as well as they should be.

Right to the point, you and I are here because we are concerned about all the bad things that have been visited upon the people's airwaves. We are concerned about the too-powerful role of a few huge media conglomerates that increasingly control both the content and the distribution of everything that our children see and hear. And we are concerned that America's children are being ignored in this period of digital transition—but, then again, so is the public interest generally being ignored.

This discussion today builds upon the debate begun with the issue of media concentration. Numerous children's advocacy groups, including the ones that organized this conference, weighed in to oppose more media consolidation. It's not hard to understand why you did so. Big Media plays such an enormous role nowadays in children's development. It has vast and growing powers to inform and entertain—or to misinform and entertain in wrong and harmful ways. My fear—and I think it's yours, too—is that what our children get from our media is less and less of what we have a right to expect.

In its media ownership decision last June, the Commission failed to protect children. It failed to even consider the link between increasing consolidation and the increasing sex and violence on the airwaves to which our children are exposed. Nor did the Commission look at the relationship between concentration and positive children's programming. The FCC conducted twelve studies on its own, but not one focused on the needs of our kids. Not one examined how Big Media would serve or disserve our youngest viewers and listeners before the Commission waved the green flag for still more consolidation.

Thank goodness that Children Now stepped up to the plate to examine the impact of consolidation on our kids. What they found wasn't good. They analyzed the market in Los Angeles and found that the number of broadcast TV programs for children dropped sharply after independent local stations were swallowed up in media mergers. The study found a nearly **50 percent drop** in children's programming!

So we blew that opportunity. But now we have another chance. I don't see many signals that we will actually seize the moment, but maybe if you folks here push and scream and shout enough, you can force the issue. Here's what I'm talking about: we are

in the midst of a transition to digital broadcasting. This Commission has been pretty good in forcing progress on the *mechanics* of this transition—things like DTV tuners, over-the-air receivers and broadcast flags. But it's been eerily silent on the most important question—how is digital broadcasting going to serve the public interest? Talk about a digital gap! What will viewers and listeners, particularly children, get back from providing additional spectrum privileges to broadcasters?

We actually started having a discussion about digital television and the public interest a few years ago, and it was a pretty good one. The previous Commission even initiated a couple of specific proceedings—one of them specifically on children's programming for DTV. But under the current Commission, these proceedings have sat and sat. We managed to get the record refreshed after a good bit of pushing over a year ago. We even got a commitment then to deal with the issues expeditiously. But now it's June of 2004 and still no action. I have been pushing the Commission to finalize action on these rulemakings and then go beyond that with a more comprehensive proceeding on the public interest obligations of digital television broadcasters.

Already there are more than 200 television stations that are multicasting. And yet, those broadcasters do not know what they must do to discharge their obligations, and viewers are equally in the dark about what's going to happen. Does a station have an obligation to carry children's programming on all of its broadcast streams? Can a station carry its weekly hours of children's programming exclusively on one stream—and, if so, how do we make sure it's a stream that has the resources needed to get good programming done? Digital broadcasting opens significant opportunities to entertain and educate our children—but it's not going to happen without a lot of thought and it's not going to happen at all unless we get it sorted out now, before the Commission acts on the request of broadcasters for must-carry rights on cable. There are so many questions. How can the interactive features of DTV direct parents to children's programming and away from programming that is inappropriate? How do we prevent the over-commercialization of children's television in a digital age? Yet, due to our inaction, broadcasters don't know the answers and the public doesn't know. So, it's time to accord the public interest issue the high priority it deserves, and must have, if we and our kids are going to harvest the full benefits of DTV.

I am now hearing reports and rumors that Commissioners may soon be presented with an item broaching some of these matters. If this is true, I hope it won't be timid and it won't be tepid. And I hope we will have time to consider and discuss it with the care that such important and sensitive matters deserve. While we probably won't get the moon and stars, we should still aim high. You must insist—just as I will insist—upon a good and forward-looking item that advances the quantity and quality of children's programming. You need to make it clear, starting here today, that you won't settle for anything less. We have few if any domestic priorities as urgent as deciding how the people's airwaves are going to be used to advance the people's well-being. The people made their interest clear last year. And our kids need to be front-and-center in our consideration of these issues. Let's work together to make it happen.

