

**REMARKS OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS
FREE PRESS MEDIA REFORM CONFERENCE
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI
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Thank you, Bob. Thank you Free Press for bringing us together and keeping us together in this great crusade for media democracy. Thank you to everyone in this room for making this a week-end America will look back upon with genuine pride. More than 40 years ago, at the height of the Cold War, John F. Kennedy went to Berlin, and he said to those who doubted the future of freedom behind the Iron Curtain, "Let them come to Berlin." Tonight we say to any who doubt the future of a free media in America, "Let them come to St. Louis." Because what I have seen this week-end in St. Louis is that this great grassroots crusade for media democracy is alive, it is well and it is together. And together we are going to bring it home to victory for every citizen of this great country.

It took a lot of people to bring this issue to the forefront of the nation's consciousness two years ago. It took people raising their voices in protest, in song, in books and pamphlets, on web sites and blogs, in whatever media and whatever forum they could manage to penetrate. Working hard and working together, you moved this issue outside the DC Beltway and onto the highways and byways leading into every city, town and hamlet across the heartland of our nation. What a difference you made!

Across the political and cultural spectrum, you banded people together in a common cause. Some 3 million Americans contacted the FCC to express their concern about media concentration. I didn't know there were 3 million people who even knew the FCC existed, much less were concerned enough to contact us. In these times when so many issues divide us, and we're called a 50-50, or now a 51-49 nation, groups from right to left, Republicans and Democrats, concerned parents, creative artists, religious leaders, civil rights activists, and labor organizations came together and fought together for diversity in their media. They fought in the red states. They fought in the blue states. They fought everywhere. They fought for America.

Now your voices are needed again—now more than ever. Because these issues are hurtling back toward us—in truth, they never went away. Those awful rules that an FCC majority passed two years ago to loosen our media protections have been sent back to us by the courts. That's the good news. The bad news is they were sent back to whom? To the very same folks who dreamed them up in the first place! They screwed it up once. Believe me, they're 100% capable of screwing it up again.

So I have to tell you that I am worried. Worried, of course, about the effects of further consolidation on the entertainment and news and information we get. Worried, of course, that anything with the name "independent" on it seems to be on the endangered species list. Worried about jobs: news anchors and radio and TV journalists no longer needed as stations are consolidated. Technicians, engineers, all kinds of workers told their livelihoods are gone. Worried about what big media does to minorities—how issues are not covered, how people are wrongly depicted in programming, how little minorities own or have to say about the direction of our nation's media. Worried about creative

artists who can't get air time on their home town radio because home town people no longer control what the consolidated stations play. Let me ask you this—when Appalachian bluegrass and New Orleans jazz and Motown disappear from the dial—is America going to be better off?

Here's something else I worry about, and you need to worry about it, too. It is this: a lot of pressure is going to be brought on the FCC to write new rules, write them quickly, and write them inside the Commission, far away from the sunlight of public participation and public input. I can see a scenario where Big Media pushes us hard to change rule at a time, say every month or two, and thereby swallow the whole cake by eating a piece at a time. I have no intention of letting that happen. Commissioner Adelstein has no intention of letting that happen. But it will happen—without another mass out-pouring of public participation like we had two years ago. If citizens insist upon their rightful role in the decision-making process, citizens will win. But that's the *only* way we win.

So tonight I ask your help in this all-American crusade to reclaim the people's media for the people. Consider this a call to action. Don't listen to those who counsel that now is not the time to fight. Don't let the usual suspects inside the Beltway write the rules. Jump in with both feet. Involve your friends, your neighbors, anyone you can. Convene meetings. Write letters and articles. Take to the Internet. Use every source you can access. Do everything you can—and then do a little bit more!

A lot of work to do? Sure. Powerful interests on the other side? You bet. A steep climb? Absolutely. Winnable? I have a two-word answer for that one: Damned right! If we role up our sleeves, all of us—advocates, creative artists, elected officials, consumers, citizens everywhere – we can settle this issue of who is going to control our media and for what purposes. And we can settle it in favor of airwaves of, by and for the people of this great country.

Thank you.