

“La Diversidad Fortalece A Los Medios”

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Do you believe that Latinos are fairly portrayed by the largest media outlets in America? If you have a hunch that the coverage is biased or misleading, you're not alone.

Journalism experts have found that less than 1 percent of network news stories feature Latinos. Even worse, when news stories *do* involve Latinos, they are most often about crime, terrorism, or immigration. The same goes for leading news magazines – less than 2 percent of all stories focused on Latinos in any significant way. And when a genuine Latino political issue is covered, it's often with the assumption that Latino voters are something other Americans need to fear. Here's an actual headline from a leading news magazine: “A Latin Power Surge. A New Mayor in L.A. A Decisive Showing in '04. Latinos are Making their Mark on Politics as Never Before. Get Used to It.”

So why does the mainstream media present such a skewed view of Latinos? To accurately answer this question, members of the Federal Communications Commission are coming to get your input at a town hall meeting at the University of Southern California on August 31.

I for one believe that towns and cities across the nation are facing a crisis of media consolidation that is eroding local news reporting. As a result, only a handful of media giants produce a staggering percentage of the news that Americans see on TV, read about in the papers, hear on the radio, and view on the Internet.

Needless to say, news produced on a national scale tends to be a poor fit for the local communities it is supposed to serve. It becomes just another product to be produced at the lowest possible cost. For a company that aims to produce a one-size-fits-all product, America's diversity can seem like a problem to be accommodated. But by now, we should all understand that America's strength *is* its diversity. And in order to harness this strength, America also needs a diverse media, committed to reporting on the issues of importance in local communities.

Even more alarming, the problem could get worse. In July, the FCC launched a proceeding that might severely scale back the media concentration protections that exist today. These rules, among other things, limit a single corporation from completely dominating local TV and radio markets or from merging a community's TV stations, radio stations, and newspaper.

Three years ago a majority at the FCC voted (over my strong objection) to scrap many of the ownership limits we had. The majority's rules would have allowed one company to own three television stations, eight radio stations, the daily newspaper, the

cable system, and the largest Internet provider in our larger cities. A storm of public outrage ensued.

Three million citizens contacted the FCC to express their opposition. I didn't know that three million people knew there was an FCC! But they went ahead and wrote us out of a strong belief that we desperately need rules to prevent one-size-fits-all news from becoming the acceptable standard in our communities. Congress went on record with its concerns, too, and then a federal court found the rules both substantively and procedurally flawed and sent them back to us to rework.

So a new dialogue is underway. But this time it needs to be much more than an inside-the-Beltway discussion between a government agency and a few mega-corporations. What we need to know is whether Latinos are being well-served by the media served up to them. Are they getting the diversity of viewpoint they deserve? Is local talent being covered? Community issues? As we enter another election season, are stations covering the important issues that confront us or do they just focus on the polls and run profitable campaign ads? We need to tap your local expertise to look both broadly and deeply at what is happening here.

Even if the future of our media is not your number one issue, it needs to be—*it has to be*—your second issue. That's because Americans get their input and develop their views about all the other critical issues of the day—the economy, jobs, peace and war, health care, education, the list goes on—from the media. I can't think of any of these issues that wouldn't fare much better in an open, diverse, community-responsive and competitive environment.

I urge you to attend the town meeting. After traveling the length and breadth of this country, I believe 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. But it will take a lot of us, working together, to make it happen.