

**STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER JONATHAN S. ADELSTEIN
BROADCAST MEDIA OWNERSHIP HEARING
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA**

FEBRUARY 23, 2007

I would like to thank Chairman Martin for convening this third media ownership hearing here in Harrisburg. While it would have been helpful to give area residents more advance notice of this hearing, it is a welcomed opportunity for us to get outside of Washington and hear directly from the people who will be affected by the decisions we make about how many media outlets a single company can own and control. We should remember that the public airwaves belong to you, the people – not the media companies that are licensed to use the airwaves for profit. Deciding who owns the media is fundamentally about our culture, our democracy, and our way of life. It is about who owns what you read, watch and hear. Your presence here today demonstrates that you are concerned about these important decisions that the Commission will make.

The law that governs our actions is very simple. It tells us to promote the public interest. The best way to do that is to hear directly from you, rather than thinking somehow we inside the Washington Beltway know what is best for you and your family. So I am pleased all of my colleagues are here to listen to you before acting to modify the broadcast ownership rules.

Harrisburg is a capital city that has experienced a renaissance in its infrastructure development, economic growth, and community life. This city and the surrounding towns on the East Shore and West Shore are full of vitality and diversity. Unfortunately, like most American cities, ownership of Harrisburg's broadcast media outlets does not reflect the communities that they are obligated to serve. Instead, local media ownership is dominated by a handful of national companies.

The question before us today is what impact this consolidation of ownership has had on the media coverage of this and surrounding communities. I have a special concern about state government because, until recently, my father served in the legislature in my home state of South Dakota. What I have learned is that here in Pennsylvania, like in most state capitals across America, the quality coverage of state legislative affairs is diminishing. Fewer media outlets cover the daily activities of the statehouse, and fewer investigative reporters are available to develop, research, and write stories that are necessary to inform the electorate. We need to hear your perspectives on this.

While there is considerable debate about what level of media consolidation is in the public interest, it is beyond a doubt that the media has a direct impact on the health of our democracy. In the landmark case, *Red Lion Broadcasting v. Federal Communications Commission*, which has roots in the Harrisburg media market, the Supreme Court observed, "it is the right of the public to receive suitable access to social, political, esthetic, moral, and other ideas and experiences." Central to our democracy is

the “uninhibited marketplace of ideas,” where all sides are heard and a diversity of viewpoints allows people to make up their own minds about issues of the day.

But when you look at today’s broadcast media landscape, we see a “if it bleeds, it leads” approach to news reporting. While this may help ratings, it is the life of our democracy that bleeds when in-depth coverage of local and national elections disappears, and when real investigative journalism is replaced with video news releases, and when the positive aspects of our communities are not covered. One national study has found that community public affairs programming accounted for less than 1/2 of 1 percent of local TV programming, compared to 14.4 percent for paid programming like infomercials for ab-crunchers.

We should learn from our mistakes in 2003, when the FCC attempted to implement the most destructive rollback of our media ownership protections in the history of American broadcasting. Over the objection of Commissioner Copps and me, the Commission issued regulations allowing one media company to own up to three TV stations, eight radio stations, and the only daily newspaper in a single community.

Since 2003, Congress, the courts, and the public have all rejected the Commission’s Order. Three million citizens nationwide, of every political stripe from right to left and virtually everyone in between, expressed their opposition to the rules. In 2004, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit right here in Pennsylvania, thanks to your own Prometheus Radio Project, sent the rules back to the Commission. It chastised the FCC for failing to consider how the proposed rules would affect minority ownership and localism. Now it is up to us to start from scratch. With your help, we can get it right this time.

Proponents of consolidation – primarily the big media companies themselves – argue we can afford less diversity because there are so many new options out there, with the Internet, iPods, satellite radio and hundreds of channels on cable and satellite. But study after study shows that broadcast radio and television are still the dominant source of local news and information, as well as entertainment programming. The broadcast industry still produces, disseminates, and ultimately controls the news, information, and entertainment programs that most inform the discourse that is essential to our democracy.

As I travel across the country to participate in forums like this, I hear complaints about hyper-commercialism, rampant homogenization, and an unforgivable lack of women and minority ownership, employment, and participation. Women make up over half of the U.S. population, but they own less than 5 percent of all television stations. And, minority ownership of radio and television stations is dismal: only 4.2 percent of radio stations and 1.5 percent of TV stations are owned by African Americans, Latinos and Asians.

In Harrisburg, Hispanics alone comprise nearly 12 percent of the population and African-Americans account for 55 percent, yet neither group owns a radio or television station. This lack of diversity may account for the inadequate coverage and a lack of

understanding of race and ethnic-related issues in America. Despite these abysmal numbers, the Commission did not acknowledge this disappointing state of minority and women ownership in its 2003 decision. To make matters worse, the Commission repealed the only policy specifically aimed at fostering diversity of ownership.

The problem can be seen here in Harrisburg because the statistics speak for themselves. According to Consumer Federation and Free Press, just four companies control over 79 percent of the Harrisburg area news market. There are three companies that own 60 percent of the commercial radio stations, with one owning 6 stations, thus creating a market where non-local entities own nearly 75 percent of the radio stations. This is especially discouraging when considering that there are no locally owned commercial news stations. There are no full-power commercial TV stations owned by a racial or ethnic minority in the Harrisburg area, and none are owned by women.

I hear that the dominant local newspaper, *Patriot News*, does a good job covering local news and events. But I am concerned with what could happen if the FCC relaxes the media ownership rules and allows cross-ownership to take place. That would allow a big media conglomerate that owns television and radio stations in Harrisburg to then buy *Patriot News*, which would allow a single owner to control over 60 percent of the Harrisburg news market.

I have heard great things about the Millennium Music Conference, held annually nearby in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, which provides an outlet for local and independent artists to have their music heard. I am also pleased to see that students at Middleton High School operate WMMS 91.1 FM, giving teenagers the opportunity to provide live commentary on local high school events. We need to encourage more of this local flair in our media markets across the nation.

Congress has given us on the Commission the responsibility to oversee the broadcasting industry in a way that fosters diversity and localism, and prevents undue concentrations of power. So we are here to find out what is happening in Harrisburg and throughout the area. You deserve – and the law requires – programming that serves the unique needs of your local communities. If we are going to craft media ownership rules that best serve the public interest, we must hear from the public. We must hear from you. That is why we are here to listen.

Thank you all for coming out to share with us your views.