

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS
FCC MEDIA OWNERSHIP HEARING
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON
NOVEMBER 9, 2007**

I want to thank every person in this hall for being here today. You had almost no notice, many had other things – like work – to do, and you had to do a lot of rearranging to be here. Some came from afar by bus and by car. You're all here because you have something important to say. Had we given decent notice, hundreds more would have come. Maybe we should call this hearing “indecent notice” – with quite possibly an FCC “indecent proposal” on media ownership to follow.

I know Seattle has important thoughts to share because I've been here before – twice for media ownership hearings – in March 2003, right before then-Chairman of the FCC Michael Powell shoved his near-catastrophic rules through the Commission – and again last November. Commissioner Adelstein was here, too. But tonight you have an opportunity to tell some of the other commissioners about what's happening to media in Seattle. Make the most of it because this is the very last of the very few field hearings sponsored by the FCC.

Thank you, Senator Cantwell, for your statement. Jonathan and I met with the Senator just 3 days ago, and we saw again how deeply she feels on this issue. Jay Inslee, thank you. You've been a tireless and eloquent leader on the issues we're hear to discuss. Frank Blethen – what can I say – he's got the public interest in his bones and no one – and I mean no one – has done more than Frank to spread the word and to right the wrongs inflicted by the media consolidation frenzy of the past decade.

Why in the world – when we see those harms everywhere around us: closed or downsized newsrooms; homogenized, nationalized entertainment; people of color denied the chance to own and operate stations; women denied the same way; musicians – really good musicians – kept off the air by corporatized, nationalized Big Media; the dumbing down of civic dialogue on which the future of our democracy depends; the list goes on and on and on – the list of problems we have not tackled in anything approaching a comprehensive manner goes similarly on and on – so why the rush to change important ownership rules before we tackle these other problems that have been so long pending at the FCC?

Did you ever notice that the FCC is always ready to run the fast break for Big Media, but it's the four-corner stall when it comes to serving the public interest? Well, it's fast break time again. It's time, we'll be told in the next week or two, to let Big Media get bigger still – probably by promoting more cross-ownership deals between TV stations and newspapers. New research only confirms what we've suspected all along – these sweetheart newspaper-broadcast combinations lead to less news and fewer voices in local markets. I don't like it – not one little bit. Do you? You know, a public opinion poll last week proves your fellow citizens don't like it either. Over 70% say

consolidation has gone too far, and almost six people in 10 want Congress to *pass a law* outlawing newspaper-television combinations in local markets! And this percentage is almost exactly alike whether you are a Republican, Democrat or Independent.

But Big Media is running that consolidation ball down the court anyhow. Imagine it's a basketball game. There comes a defender against Big Media's drive – he's a person of color – he wants a chance to get that media ball and be a part of the action. But, oh-oh, the Big Media team knocks him down. Someone tries to call "foul" but the FCC referee is looking the other way so no foul is called and the Big Media team continues its drive with no minorities on the court. They're out of the game – no place on Big Media's court for them.

Wait, here comes a public interest guard running down the court to meet Big Media. He's really mad Big Media is not playing fair; that the refs don't listen; that the other team has players who didn't even pass the eligibility rules. Oh, that's right – the eligibility rules, the fairness rules, the certification and licensing rules have all been struck from the books by the Commission referees. So the public interest guard gets knocked down, too. The crowd boos, but the game goes on. Big Media has the court to itself. Guess who's about to score. Sound familiar?

That's where we are. The rush is on to encourage more media deals and to start a new game, but without minorities and women able to even get out on the court, they won't be part of the new game. And what happened to that poor public interest guard? Well, maybe he pulled himself up from the floor and he'll be able to try again next season. The problem is that the championship game is being decided before then.

I get what's going on. But I don't get why we should let it happen. You folks, and millions of others, actually blocked Big Media's fast break when Michael Powell – incidentally he's a powerful media deal-maker now – was ready to score. It's time my friends, to stop Big Media's fast break one more time. We don't need any bad new ownership rules – not one. What we need to do is defeat any bad new ownership rules. But be vigilant. With the oversight we now have on Capitol Hill, and with the issue bubbling again at the grassroots, Big Media and its accomplices may try to look a little less grasping this time. Maybe they'll even settle for changing only one or two rules because they think they can get away with that. They shouldn't get away with that. So I want bad new rules to go down, and then I want to revisit the bad old rules that got us into this media mess in the first place. I want opportunities for minorities and women to be part of the action – not words, not promises, not a seat in the back of the media bus – but rules *before* any vote to change ownership rules. And I want us to address all the many public interest recommendations that have been mostly sitting locked in a drawer since 2000 – *before* we vote on giving Big Media more power.

Here's the bottom line: we, the FCC, have no business granting still more privileges to Big Media until we have measures in place so we *know* broadcasters will uphold their bargain – the pledge they made to serve the public interest in return for using

the people's airwaves. And if they don't uphold that bargain, you know what I think we should say? "Good-bye license."

When I was in Seattle before, people asked me what they could be doing to help. I suggested one thing would be to contact all the FCC Commissioners and contact Members of Congress. You did that, and for the Congress part, anyhow, it helped. So I hope you will do that again. But this time, let's raise the ante. Let's take it to the top. Let's be heard in The White House itself. I frankly don't know where the President is on this. He's got a lot on his plate. But why not let him know that you're involved, you care, and you're watching. Maybe he doesn't know the Commission is playing with such a hot potato. And don't stop there. A lot of people in both parties want to be President. Let them know that a lot of Americans, in red states as well as blue, are fed up with what's happened to our media. Let them know you're watching, you care, and this issue counts when you're getting ready to vote. Some of these candidates have already spoken up forcefully and well. Thank them and tell them you're with them. Tell the other candidates what you think and what you want.

Well, some of you ask, if I'm going to write the President or the candidates, shouldn't it be about Iraq, or the lack of health insurance for 45 million Americans, or about creating new jobs, or educating our kids, or prying open the doors of equal opportunity? But think about it. If one of those issues is your number one issue, and it's not going quite how you'd like it to go, maybe that's because, increasingly, that issue is filtered and funneled to us by Big Media – if they even let it into the funnel. If you think that issue would benefit from a little more media attention, a little more diversity, a little more community input and competition, then it is important enough for you to contact these leaders. You can be conservative or liberal, Democrat or Republican, red state or blue – there's no litmus test for getting involved.

I think a little more democracy in our media – a little more of airwaves serving you, their real owners – would be a blessing for America. "Media Reform: Take It to the Top." All in favor say "Aye."

Thank you very much.