

**Remarks of Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein
Public Hearing on Media Ownership
Seattle, Washington
November 9, 2007**

Thank you all for coming out on such short notice. I am sure even hundreds if not thousands more people would have attended if you were given proper notice. In my five years on the Commission, I have never heard of a Chairman scheduling a public meeting on such short notice without consulting his colleagues, so this is unprecedented.

In most cities, you could get away with slipping in and out quietly. Usually, the local media outlets are owned by distant media conglomerates itching to get even bigger. For some strange reason, the media almost never gives much advance notice that the FCC is coming to a particular city. Could it be they have a conflict of interest?

For those who say media ownership does not matter, I say look at one man from Seattle: Frank Blethen. His family has been here over a century. He owns the local newspaper, and he cares about this community. His newspaper gave this hearing the coverage it deserves every single day during this truncated advance notice period. And he had assistance on the ground from the dedicated and passionate advocacy of Jonathan Lawson and everyone at Reclaim the Media.

If we let local voices like Frank Blethen's get bought up by voracious media giants looking to swallow up even more local outlets, voices like his will be snuffed out forever. Do you want big out-of-state companies to buy your newspapers and TV stations combined? Are you satisfied with your local media today? Do you think more consolidation is the answer?

Well, we should listen to you rather than the media lobbyists back in the other Washington. The law says we are to serve the public interest, not the interests of the media giants that seek to profit by using the public airwaves without serving the needs of the local community. We are here in the real Washington, with real people who have suffered too much already from the mistakes we have made in D.C.

We have forgotten that the public airwaves belong to the American people. You are here tonight because you want to take them back.

Since 2003, Commissioner Copps and I have held two public meetings in Seattle. We heard your voices loud and clear. These forums at the Seattle Public Library and the University of Washington were some of the most insightful I have ever witnessed. You communicated your concerns with eloquence, wisdom and passion.

Tonight's meeting was literally scheduled at the last possible minute allowed by law. It is more than coincidence that the same last-minute announcement was made for the Washington, D.C., localism hearing that was just held on Halloween. This pattern points to a conscious effort to minimize turnout and to just check the box that these

hearings were held. The goal is to let big media have their way. You are just a little speed bump along the road to further media concentration.

Well, I do not see you as an obstacle. Commissioner Copps does not see you as an obstacle. And a strong bipartisan majority of Congress does not see you as an obstacle. In fact, you represent the people we are supposed to serve.

I see your interests and community needs as the end goal in themselves. Unfortunately, judging from the way this hearing was arranged, it looks like the media conglomerates' agenda is far ahead of yours at the FCC. If you see a proposal for more consolidation made quickly after this final hearing, you will know your input was dismissed. But those of you who made it out here to the Great Hall are not about to let that happen. Your views need to be accounted for in any proposal or decision we make.

You deserve quality local music, news and public affairs information. Your great local musicians deserve to have their music played on local radio stations – during the times when people are actually listening. Your own Scott McCaughey tells us that while Seattle is a huge national force in music, because of consolidation, even the most successful local artists are having a harder time getting airplay than their “alt-rock antecedents.”

And minority communities deserve to be portrayed on the evening news in a manner that reflects their many contributions, not underrepresented, misrepresented or stereotyped. Women and people of color should be owners, and not just consumers or lessees, of broadcast media services.

Women make up over half of the U.S. population, and minorities make up over a third. But women and people of color own broadcast stations at roughly one-tenth of their level of representation in the population. Fewer and fewer media companies are gaining more and more control over the means of distributing ideas. That means fewer small businesses, fewer women, fewer African-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and Native Americans can use the public airwaves to contribute and have their own voices heard. That is a tragedy in a country in which diversity is our strength.

You have some great elected representatives watching out for you in D.C. Senator Maria Cantwell and Congressman Jay Inslee wrote us to ask that you be given four weeks notice for this event. It was quickly ignored in an act of incredible insensitivity. Well, I know your representatives and their dedication to serve your interests. Their request may have been ignored, but they will not be. My request to give you more notice may have been ignored, but I will not be. Your community's right to fair notice may have been ignored, but you will not be! You are here tonight because you will not let your voices be swept under the rug as the FCC does the bidding of media conglomerates.

Just yesterday in the U.S. Senate, a bipartisan bill was introduced with Senators Cantwell, Dorgan, Lott, Obama, Snowe and others. It would require the FCC to have a 90-day comment period on any proposed media ownership rule changes and to conduct a

separate proceeding on localism and diversity with another 90 day comment period. It requires us to establish an independent panel on female and minority ownership, and to conduct, once and for all, a complete census of the number of women and minority owners of radio and TV stations. After the independent panel makes recommendations, the legislation requires that we act on them before the Commission tries to change any media ownership rule.

You can join in demanding that the FCC complete its localism proceeding before – not after – it moves on media ownership. And you need to demand that we properly study and support any changes we make with facts this time, not ideology or pre-baked studies. We need to establish clear and quantifiable public interest obligations for broadcasters. And we need to implement changes to expand the number of media outlets owned by women and people of color. You can join me and your leaders in Congress in demanding that these policies are implemented before – not after – we change the media ownership rules.

You have a big responsibility tonight. You who are here speak for many millions of your fellow citizens across the U.S. who believe that media consolidation has already gone too far. A recent survey found 70 percent of Americans see this as a problem. By a two-to-one margin, they believe newspapers should not own TV stations in the same city.

It turns out the same proportions of Republicans and Democrats, conservatives, moderates and liberals share these concerns. That is reflected in the bipartisan group of panelists and elected officials joining us tonight. Letting big media get bigger is not a partisan issue. It goes against the grain of the American spirit we all share. Conservatives do not like media giants to gain too much power any more than liberals do, and never have. So you are far from alone. You are in the big majority!

If the majority of the FCC opposes the majority of America in the name of the “public interest,” you will see a willful act of arrogance. You will see a handful of unelected bureaucrats telling you “we know what’s in your interest better than you know for yourselves.” That will face a harsh judgment by your elected representatives on both sides of the aisle in Congress, with Washington State leading the way.

If all else fails, and this is not done right, Congress has special fast track procedures to veto any regulations put out by agencies like the FCC. In 2004, the US Senate voted in an overwhelming bipartisan majority to do just that, but it got bottled up in the U.S. House. Now, if in 2007 the FCC sides with the powerful few media companies over the public interest, Congress can quickly veto it. Congress can send it to the dustbin of history where it belongs. And I have no doubt your own elected representatives will lead the charge.

So you, the people, have the last word. And here tonight, residents of the Pacific Northwest have the last word. So thanks for coming out. Now, let us hear from you!