

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

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December 6, 2011

Chairman Julius Genachowski
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

RE: MB Docket No. 09-182, 2010 Quadrennial Review – Review of the Commission’s Broadcast Ownership Rules and Other Rules Adopted Pursuant to Section 202 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996

Dear Chairman Genachowski:

We thank the Commission for moving forward on the quadrennial review of its media ownership rules. As the Commission reviews its existing media ownership limits, we urge you to protect the public interest by promoting rules that encourage competition, localism, and diversity in all local media markets. Historically, media ownership protections such as the newspaper-broadcast cross-ownership rule, the local radio and local television ownership rules, and the radio-television cross-ownership rule have ensured competition in news gathering among local news outlets, encouraged employment of staff in independent newsrooms and station operations, and promoted the continued presence of local programming.

Protecting localism is a critical and longstanding goal of the Federal Communications Commission’s media ownership rules. However, today’s media marketplace reflects a troubling decline in the level of local journalism. Unfortunately, the Internet, while a critical and innovative platform, has not substantially increased competition in, or diversity of, original, local news reporting. For example, a study commissioned by the Commission as part of the 2010 media ownership review found “almost no evidence that the Internet has expanded the number of local news outlets. [...] Those sites that do receive an audience are overwhelmingly newspaper and local television station Websites, rather than new and independent sources of local news.”¹

Similarly, the Commission’s own staff report on *The Information Needs of Communities* indicates that although the Internet may create the appearance of an abundance of voices, this has not necessarily resulted in a greater presence of original, local news content. The report points to several studies conducted in local media markets demonstrating that “the growing number of

¹ Matthew Hindman, *Less of the Same: The Lack of Local News on the Internet* (FCC Media Ownership Study #6), June 2011, 29.

web outlets relies on a relatively fixed, or declining, pool of original reporting provided by traditional media.” The report notes that some of these traditional media outlets have, indeed, been found to be doing less original reporting than before, while online sources have “chewed over” content from traditional sources using analysis that has been “thinner and not as well researched.”² These findings suggest that permitting further consolidation among traditional media outlets could result in a further decline in local media ownership and news production.

Importantly, mergers and acquisitions among newspapers and television stations historically have not demonstrably relieved the financial burdens of these outlets. On the other hand, consolidation among newsrooms in some cases has led to layoffs, increased debt held by media companies, and caused a decline in the diversity of viewpoints necessary to sustain a functioning democracy. During this difficult economic time, strong rules are needed to support the work of newsroom staff and the production of local, investigative journalism.

In 2008, 56 Members of the House of Representatives cosponsored a resolution expressing disapproval of then-Chairman Kevin Martin’s media ownership rules, which relaxed the agency’s ban on common ownership of a local newspaper and broadcast outlet in the same market. We would be equally concerned about a similar weakening of media ownership rules in the Commission’s current review, and urge the Commission again today to uphold important protections for localism and diversity.

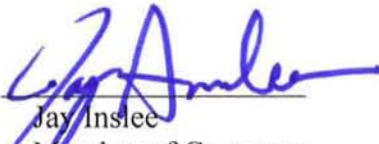
We are also concerned about efforts by some media companies to consolidate newsrooms and other operations even as they remain legally separate entities. A lack of strong rules governing such agreements has caused further layoffs, as well as fewer and less diverse sources of independent local journalism. We urge the Commission to examine the impact of these agreements on jobs, diversity and localism in media programming, competition in local advertising, and competition for carriage by subscription television services.

As always, thank you for your attention to this matter.

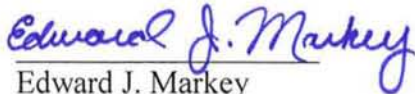
Sincerely,

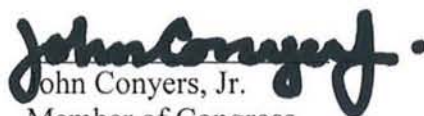

Mike Doyle
Member of Congress



Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



Jay Inslee
Member of Congress


²Steven Waldman, et al., *The Information Needs of Communities: The Changing Media Landscape in a Broadband Age*, Federal Communications Commission Staff Report, July 2011, 123.


Edward J. Markey
Member of Congress

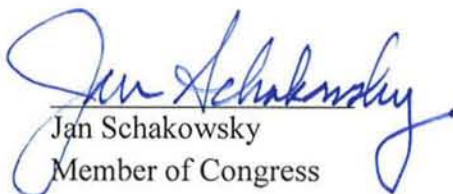

John Conyers, Jr.
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cc: Commissioner Michael J. Copps
Commissioner Robert M. McDowell
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn