State of the Net Conference 2026
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FCC Commissioner Anna M. Gomez – Remarks

Good morning, and thank you for inviting me back to State of the Net.

This is my third consecutive year speaking here since becoming an FCC Commissioner. Each year, I've tried to focus on a different challenge in communications policy, and what it means for consumers and for our democracy.

My first year, I spoke about the importance of accessible and affordable connectivity, and the consequences of leaving people behind as networks expand.

Last year, I warned about the dangers of the FCC straying beyond its proper role and using regulatory power to intimidate, pressure, or influence online speech. It was a prescient warning about what happens when government threatens private actors for decisions that should be driven by consumer demand and protected by the First Amendment, not shaped by political pressure.

This year, I want to talk about what I see as another looming threat. One that is quieter, more structural, and potentially just as damaging if left unchecked. That is the rapid consolidation of media ownership, and what it means for local voices, for competition, and for consumers.

This may not sound like a traditional State of the Net topic. But the lines that once separated communications markets no longer exist. What were distinct industries decades ago have converged, and the internet now directly shapes the economics of broadcast media, often being used as a justification to do away with guardrails without regard to what that means for local journalism and the public interest.

Thirty years ago, the media world looked nothing like it does today.

In 1996, most Americans got their news from a daily newspaper, a local television broadcast, or the radio. Cable was growing, but streaming did not exist. Social media was not even a concept. Google had not yet been founded. The iPhone itself was more than a decade away.

That was the context in which Congress passed the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

I was at the FCC as we began implementing that law. Even then, there was a clear understanding that technology would evolve quickly and in unexpected ways. But there was also a shared belief that some principles had to endure, including competition, localism, and viewpoint diversity. That did not mean privileging any particular ideology or viewpoint. It meant ensuring that no single voice, company, or interest could dominate what communities see, hear, and rely on for information. The goal was competition that produced real choice, local decision making, and independent sources of news.

Just yesterday marked the thirtieth anniversary of that law. It is worth asking not just what has changed since 1996, but what risks we face today as media markets grow more concentrated, ownership becomes more centralized, and fewer decisions are made close to the communities they affect.

For all the ways media consumption has changed, one thing remains true. Local journalism is still the backbone of our information ecosystem.

Even when people get their news through social media, search engines, or streaming platforms, much of the original reporting still comes from local journalists. When that journalism weakens, the entire information ecosystem feels it.

We have already seen this play out in the newspaper industry. Newspapers were not eliminated because people stopped caring about news. They were hollowed out through consolidation, cost cutting, and the loss of advertising revenue to digital platforms, as ownership decisions were increasingly made far from the communities they affected.

Broadcast television now faces a similar risk, but under even greater pressure.

Broadcasters are navigating declining advertising revenue, competition from digital platforms, and changing consumer habits. These pressures are real. But how we respond to them matters. When consolidation becomes the default solution, it often accelerates the very decline it is supposed to address. Fewer owners does not just mean fewer balance sheets. It means fewer independent editorial decisions and fewer local perspectives.

I hear this concern directly from people in communities already experiencing the effects of consolidation. I recently received an email from a consumer describing how a single corporate owner controls or operates most of the major broadcast affiliates in their local market. On paper, viewers appear to have multiple local news options, but many of those stations share the same reporters, crews, anchors, and often the same stories. So, while several stations may carry local news programming each night, there are really only one or two independent editorial voices. That may look like choice, but in practice it leaves viewers with fewer places to turn for independent coverage of what is happening in their own backyard.

This concern is not limited to individual communities. A recent national poll[1] found that nearly three out of four likely voters oppose large broadcast corporations buying or merging with

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[1] Lake Research Partners and the National Hispanic Media Coalition: New National Poll Shows Likely Voters Fiercely Oppose Corporate Broadcast TV Station Mergers. https://www.nhmc.org/new-national-poll-shows-likely-voters-fiercely-oppose-corporate-broadcast-tv-station-mergers/

local TV stations, with broad majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and independents rejecting proposals to loosen media ownership rules.

And this is not the only concern.

We have also seen the FCC use its regulatory power to pressure coverage in ways that are favorable to this Administration, including recent suggestions that broadcasters could face regulatory consequences based on the content of a network's late night comedy program.

After days of bipartisan pushback against this weaponization of government power, the corporate parent ultimately backed off. But for several days, the large corporate behemoths that own vast numbers of local stations across the country did not.

These billion-dollar media companies have significant business before the FCC. They need regulatory approval for transactions, and they are actively seeking to reduce regulatory guardrails so they can grow even larger. That reality leaves local stations trapped in the middle, as corporate owners weigh regulatory risk against editorial independence and impose their will and their values on communities they may never meaningfully engage with.

As media ownership becomes more concentrated, this pressure will only grow. The incentive to avoid conflict can quietly override the obligation to serve local audiences.

This is why the current moment matters. Decisions about consolidation today will shape whether broadcast television continues to serve as a source of local accountability, or whether it follows the same path that left so many communities without a meaningful local newspaper presence.

Competition policy is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end, and that end is supposed to be consumers.

That distinction matters, because it is where competition policy across the federal government is heading in the wrong direction.

On one hand, the Administration has shown a willingness to tilt the regulatory playing field in favor of certain legacy media companies so long as they are owned by friends or allies. On the other, it raises legitimate concerns about concentration in streaming, which is now one of the most dominant parts of the media ecosystem, but does so selectively and without applying the same principles consistently across the industry.

That kind of selective signaling matters because it shapes market behavior well beyond any single transaction. And in the areas where the FCC does have clear authority, particularly broadcast ownership, those signals are being reinforced rather than corrected.

Rather than asking how competition can best serve consumers and local communities, the FCC is increasingly focused on how regulation can be loosened to accommodate the business strategies of some of the largest media companies. Real economic pressure is treated as justification for consolidation without consideration of whether the outcome will continue to serve the public interest. Guardrails are framed as obstacles. And consumer interests risk becoming an afterthought.

We see this most clearly in the FCC's willingness to circumvent the law Congress put in place to limit unchecked media concentration.

Congress established a national television ownership cap to prevent exactly the kind of dominance we are now being asked to accept. That cap reflects Congress's judgment that excessive concentration threatens competition, localism, and viewpoint diversity. It is not a suggestion. It is the law.

Yet the FCC is now pursuing policies that would effectively sidestep that statutory limit. It is considering regulatory maneuvers that would allow companies to exceed the cap in practice, even if not in name. One of the clearest examples is its openness to transactions that would further entrench national dominance, including a potential merger between two major broadcast groups that would plainly violate Congress's restriction.

This is not competition policy serving consumers. It is using competition rhetoric to justify consolidation.

From a consumer perspective, the consequences are clear. Greater concentration reduces meaningful choice. It weakens competition for local advertising and local audiences. And it compounds the very pressures that have already hollowed out local journalism elsewhere.

This is why guardrails matter. Structural limits on ownership were not designed to protect incumbents or freeze markets in time. They were designed to preserve rivalry, independence, and accountability in markets where the stakes are uniquely high. Once those limits are eroded, rebuilding competition and local voices is extraordinarily difficult.

That does not mean we should ignore the real economic challenges facing broadcasters. We should pursue targeted, market specific policies that help local media respond to the realities of streaming competition, declining advertising revenue, and changing consumer habits. Smart, tailored solutions can support struggling stations without sacrificing local ownership, independence, or competition.

What we should not do is treat consolidation as the default solution.

The FCC should not be in the business of managing consolidation as an inevitability. Its role is to ensure that competition remains real, that consumers benefit, and that local communities are not sacrificed in the name of corporate growth.

If the FCC continues down its current path, it risks repeating the same mistake that hollowed out local newspapers, only this time in broadcast television. That would not be the result of technological inevitability or market forces beyond our control. It would be the result of policy choices that traded local voices for consolidation, and consumers would live with the consequences.

Thirty years ago, Congress set out to modernize communications law while protecting values that it understood could not be left to market forces alone. Competition. Localism. Accountability.

Those values remain relevant, and unfinished.

The FCC's responsibility is not to manage consolidation, but to steward a media ecosystem that serves consumers and communities in the real world. If we keep that focus, we can meet this moment without sacrificing the voices that make our democracy work.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I look forward to continuing this conversation.