

**STATEMENT OF  
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS,  
CONCURRING IN PART, DISSENTING IN PART**

Re: *2006 Quadrennial Regulatory Review & 2002 Biennial Regulatory Review—Review of the Commission’s Broadcast Ownership Rules and Other Rules Adopted Pursuant to Section 202 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Cross-Ownership of Broadcast Stations and Newspapers, Rules and Policies Concerning Multiple Ownership of Radio Broadcast Stations in Local Markets Definition of Radio Markets* (MB Docket Nos. 06-121, 02-277, MM Docket Nos. 01-235, 01-317, 00-244)

One thing we can probably all agree on is the need to start this proceeding. It has been two years since the Third Circuit sent back to us the misguided handiwork of the previous Commission. We owe the court a response to its instruction to revisit this proceeding and to do it right this time. Additionally, Congress instructed us to review all our media ownership rules in a quadrennial review, which by statute must commence this year—another reason why we should proceed. Meanwhile, the rush to consolidation continues. Since we last voted on this issue three years ago, there have been more than 3300 TV and radio stations that have had their assignment and transfer grants approved. So even under the old rules, consolidation grows, localism suffers and diversity dwindles. For these reasons, I agree that we need to start this proceeding now.

But in Washington, things aren’t always what they seem. In fact, this innocuous-looking document initiates the single most important public policy debate that the FCC will tackle this year. Don’t let its slimness fool you. It means that this Commission has begun to decide on behalf of the American people the future of our media. It means deciding whether or not to accelerate media concentration, step up the loss of local news and change forever the critical role independent newspapers perform for our Country.

It’s tempting to see this debate as important only to giant media moguls. Some companies want the government to make the decision to rush into more media concentration behind closed doors in sequestered Washington bureaucracies. But I believe that Americans need to know what the FCC is doing and that we have a solemn obligation to encourage public participation in the decision. It’s important because if we make the wrong decision our communities and our country will suffer. This debate will have far reaching implications for the credibility of information Americans get from the media—for the vitality of the civic dialogue that determines the direction of our democracy—and for whether TV and radio offer entertainment that is creative, uplifting and local or degrading, banal and homogenized.

Let’s review some history. We all know that in 2003 the FCC tried to eliminate important safeguards that protected media diversity, localism and competition. A majority of Commissioners approved *stunning*—there is no other word for it—rules that would allow one corporation to own, in a single community, up to three TV stations, eight radio stations, the cable system, the only daily newspaper and the biggest Internet provider. How can it be good for our Country to invest such sweeping power in one media mogul or one giant corporation?

Three years ago the FCC tried to inflict this massive wave of further consolidation onto an already highly concentrated media industry. The majority of the Commission voted to do so without seeking adequate input from the American people, without conducting adequate studies and without even revealing to the country what the new rules would be before forcing a vote. I

pleaded with the majority to do more comprehensive research, to ask the tough questions and to halt the blind rush to more consolidation. My pleading fell on deaf ears. A public, transparent process was not what was wanted. Instead, our far-reaching review of critical media concentration protections was run as a classic inside-the-Beltway process with too little outreach from the Commission and too little opportunity for public participation.

The Commission's stealth process three years ago and the ownership rules that resulted from it galvanized Americans all across this country. In response, millions of Americans from right and left, Republican and Democrat, concerned parents, creative artists, religious leaders, independent businesses, civil rights activists and labor organizations united to protest the Commission's actions. Senators and members of Congress from both parties and from all parts of the country called for those rules to be overturned. Commissioner Adelstein and I traveled the country attending hearings on this issue. On media consolidation, there are no red or blue states—there is only an all-American, grassroots issue about what government proposes to do to the people's airwaves. The Senate voted twice to overturn the rules and the House, it was clear to all, would have done so if permitted to vote. In time, the court held that the FCC's ownership rules were legally and procedurally flawed, sending them back to the FCC to begin again, which brings us to today.

All of that is wrapped up in this little document. Don't underestimate it. We have a choice to make. Will we repeat the mistakes of the past? Or will we work for a process and an outcome that respect the millions of Americans that care deeply about their communities' media and what their kids watch, hear and read? We'll soon know what choice the FCC makes. We'll undoubtedly have some hearings and some research this time—I think at least that part of the lesson has been learned. But Americans know the difference between a fig leaf and a real commitment.

If you see hearings in your hometown, instead of a just a few preselected cities, you'll know. If you see FCC Commissioners come to listen to your point of view personally, instead of expecting you to hire a \$500 an hour lobbyist to get heard, you'll know. If the FCC contracts for independent, well-funded studies and seeks public comment on those studies, instead of buying a few-half hearted, time-crunched papers that slide into the record without comment, you'll know. And, critically, if the FCC shows you the specific rules that will reshape the American media before forcing a vote, instead of rushing from this short document to a final vote, you'll know.

You should expect your government to do more this time. We ought to be able to work together and do better. I hope we can. The answer will become apparent in the months ahead. The process we are launching will have to be watched and validated every step of the way.

To be successful in this effort, we will need to work really hard, get around the country, look at various markets, collect the data and reach out to build an adequate record. Good, sustainable rules are the result of an open public process, a serious attempt to gather all the relevant data and a commitment to transparency. Bad rules and legal vulnerability result from an opaque regulatory process and inadequate data.

- ***Public Process:*** This time we need to include the people in our process instead of trying to exclude them. We need to hear from anybody who has a stake in how this is resolved. And everyone has an interest and a stake. I asked for some dozen themed hearing around the country, so we could examine the impact of media consolidation on such topics as minorities,

senior citizens, religious broadcasters, family-friendly programming, jobs, independent programming, those with disabilities, campaign coverage and payola. We couldn't get agreement on these. But we will monitor closely any hearings that are held under Commission auspices and if they fall short of true openness and inclusiveness, I will do my part to make that known. Good hearings must include all sides of the debate and be held in diverse communities around the country. Last time, I learned fifty times more about what is going on in various media markets at grassroots hearings and town hall meetings than I ever could have learned by isolating myself in my office inside the Beltway and reading formal comments. And citizens have a right to expect direct access to decision-makers at the FCC. When a regulatory agency is charged by the law with important public policy matters, it has the obligation to reach out, explain and solicit citizen input. A handful of generalized FCC hearings are not themselves enough. I hope citizens in hundreds of communities across this country will gather to discuss the future of the media. These issues deserve to be discussed in every community because they are going to affect every community. For my part, I stand ready to attend as many of these community hearings as I can.

- ***Research and Data:*** This time, we also need better research and a willingness to ask the tough questions. We need independent studies on the impact of media concentration in a variety of markets so that the FCC can base its decisions on a more solid foundation. Last time a number of in-house studies were undertaken, but they didn't ask most of the questions that needed to be asked and both their methodologies and conclusions received widespread criticism. We are talking here about understanding a mega-billion dollar industry, and a few studies done on the cheap just are not going to tell us what we need to know. What we need instead are independent researchers to produce some real data on important questions like the impact on independence when newspapers and broadcasters are owned by the same conglomerate, the impact of increasing consolidation on minorities and the correlation between media concentration and broadcast indecency. These are only a few of the questions we need to understand before we vote. I, for one, would be reluctant to vote on final rules unless and until we have the information and analysis needed to inform our votes.
- ***Transparency:*** This time, we need a transparent process that ensures we understand the full implications of our decisions—both the intended consequences and the unintended ones. Such a process makes inevitably for better policy. It also makes for better buy-in from the people. And it would enhance the sustainability of Commission decisions in court. A transparent process is especially critical for issues of this magnitude when the Notice asks broad, general questions. Let's remember the beating the Commission took in court for failing to inform the American people of its proposals last time before we were required to vote. I am deeply disappointed that this Notice does not contain a specific, up-front commitment to share proposed media concentration rules with the American people in advance of a final vote. I do not see how we can be transparent and comply with the dictates of the Third Circuit without letting the American people know about and comment on any new standards of measurement that we adopt in developing our ultimate decision. I frankly fear that in the absence of a Further Notice and lacking a commitment to a comprehensive final Order incorporating all of the ownership rules, an attempt could be made to split off one or two rules and ram them through the Commission. This must not be allowed to happen and I dissent in part because such protections for the people are lacking in today's proposal.

Finally, there are two other aspects of this item that should give us all pause. I am disappointed that localism is not front-and-center in this proceeding. For decades the

Commission has interpreted the Communications Act to require broadcasters to be responsive to local concerns and to represent a diversity of views and opinions. Localism and media ownership are inextricably linked. Ownership interests have a duty to air programming responsive to the needs and interests of their communities. But if we really want our local stations to be accountable to our local community, why should citizens who want to dial up local station owners have to call from one end of the Country to another? Is it really good for our Country for distant powers in New York or Los Angeles to dictate so much of what we see, hear and read in our hometown? These are important questions that go right to the heart of this proceeding. But you won't find them asked here. Instead, the Commission goes to great lengths to isolate our stalled localism proceeding from today's media ownership proceeding. The most this Notice does is commit our staff to compiling a summary of the dated record we have in our localism docket. Though there is bipartisan support for completing our localism proceeding before revving up media ownership, the Commission will apparently choose to leave localism stuck at the starting gate.

I am also disappointed that this item fails to commit to specific efforts to advance ownership by minorities. The Third Circuit took the Commission's earlier decision to the woodshed for sidelining proposals to advance minority ownership. Despite this, all we can muster up here are a few questions about this glaring challenge. Why won't we commit to studying the state of minority media ownership in this country and the impact that consolidation has had? Are we afraid of what the facts might show? It is no excuse to argue that many of the nation's broadcast licenses were given away decades ago when women and people of color were unlikely to obtain them. Those sins of omission need to be excised and new strategies to encourage diversity in ownership and jobs and programming need to be put in place. While people of color make up over 30 percent of our population, they own only 4.2 percent of the nation's radio stations and 1.5 percent of the nation's TV stations! More recent statistics suggest that even these numbers are in free fall. I believe the ownership of our media should look more like the diversity of our people. But if all the Commission does is ask a few pat questions and then sweep this issue under the rug one more time, we are not laying the groundwork for progress.

Let me conclude with a challenge to our nation's media to take up this issue, highlight it, give it the attention it merits, inform the debate and spark a national conversation on these issues all across this broad land of ours. With relatively few exceptions, the media—big media especially—failed the test last time, and failed it badly. I hope that was not because some very important media enterprises have financial interests riding on the outcome of the ownership proceeding. Major media companies are at pains to assure us their newsgathering operations are independent of their corporate interests. Here is an excellent opportunity to test that proposition. Because ignoring the issue of media concentration is not going to make it go away.

Launching this proceeding is the easy part. Now comes the hard work. So much hangs in the balance. If we are serious about it and do not treat this proceeding as business-as-usual, if we approach these issues with receptivity on all sides to hard facts and compelling evidence and if we reach out—really reach out—to people all across this land, I believe the Commission can arrive at a decision that will withstand judicial and Congressional scrutiny and more importantly, the scrutiny of the American people. I for one am ready to roll up my sleeves and work with my colleagues to get the job done and done right this time. The American people have a right to expect more from this Commission than they got from the previous one.