

4 POINTS TO REMEMBER

In 2003, despite a widespread public outcry, the Federal Communications Commission voted 3-2 to loosen broadcast ownership rules. This decision would have allowed Big Media companies to gobble up even more local stations. The courts ultimately rejected the FCC's rule changes and sent them back to the Commission for a rewrite.

Now the FCC is again taking up the issue. They will decide how, and to what extent, broadcast ownership rules should be changed. As FCC Commissioner Michael Copps has warned, "They screwed it up once. Believe me, they're 100 percent capable of screwing it up again."

That's why it's crucial for the public to weigh in now. Here are four points to keep in mind about media consolidation:

1) Big Media stifles viewpoints

When one company buys multiple media outlets in a single city or town, that corporation gains immense influence over what information a community can access. Big corporations push out other outlets that may offer competing points of view. That means less diversity of voices and a narrower range of debate.

2) Big Media doesn't serve local communities

In exchange for their free use of the public airwaves, local TV and radio broadcasters are supposed to serve the public interest. Yet they often ignore important local issues, pander to sensationalism, provide poor coverage of local elections, and snub local voices. As local stations get bought up by big, national corporations with centralized operations, they become even less accountable to the communities they serve.

3) Big Media ignores diversity

Corporate media conglomerates are more concerned with profit than with responsible programming. The needs of people of color, the working class and rural citizens are squelched or ignored because these people aren't advertisers' target audiences.

4) We need diverse, local ownership of the media.

Without ownership limits, giant national corporations buy up local stations and eliminate diverse, local and independent programming in the interest of profits. If the FCC is serious about fostering localism and diversity on the airwaves, it must enact protections against consolidated corporate ownership.

Media policies have favored powerful corporations over local communities for too long. For decades, the biggest media companies have had the ear of the FCC and Congress, while the public has been ignored. As the FCC rewrites its ownership rules and Congress debates legislation that will shape the entire media system for years to come, it's time our policymakers listened to the public, not just Big Media lobbyists.



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Free Press is a national, nonpartisan organization working to involve the public in media policymaking and to craft policies for more democratic media.