

MEDIA OWNERSHIP RULES THREATEN DIVERSITY OF IDEAS

Americans need access to a diversity of viewpoints to fully participate in our democratic society. Media should provide a wide range of news, commentary and cultural programming.

The Federal Communications Commission is seeking changes that would undermine the diversity of voices in our media. The proposed rules would make it easier for one company to own more than one television station in a market, and would allow single companies to own both a major television station and a daily newspaper in the same area. In effect, the FCC would hand a bigger megaphone to the media conglomerates that already control much of the nation's television, radio and newspapers.

The FCC should preserve the diversity of viewpoints in communications. Relaxing the already weak limits on ownership will ultimately place the marketplace for ideas in the hands of a few mega-corporations, leading to more homogenized content and stifling minority voices.

Lax Ownership Rules Can Lead to Media Concentration

Since the 1996 Telecommunications Act expanded the number of stations that a single owner may run, the number of radio station owners has shrunk by a third. Nationally, 10 companies dominate two-thirds of the market in terms of numbers of listeners and revenue. Television is even more consolidated - almost 90 percent of television outlets are controlled by only five companies: AOL Time-Warner, Disney, Viacom, General Electric and News Corporation.

Media Concentration Limits Diversity of Ideas

With fewer owners comes the loss of local programming and an increase in homogenized content. Media conglomerates also have refused to run content because of its message or the politics of its sponsor. In 2004, CBS, NBC and UPN refused to run an ad by the United Church of Christ that showcased the church's inclusion of minorities, gays and people with disabilities. After members of Dixie Chicks voiced their criticism of President George W. Bush in 2003, Cumulus Media and Cox Radio forbade their stations from playing their music, effectively closing access to major country stations across the nation.

FCC Should Preserve Diversity of Voices

Media ownership should reflect America's diversity. Yet, according to the research group Free Press, only 8 percent of full-power radio stations and 3 percent of television stations are owned by minorities. About 3 percent of radio stations and 5 percent of television stations are owned by women. An ownership club dominated by white males should not control what America's increasingly diverse population sees and hears.

