

# Media Democracy:

*why it should be your second most important issue*

**Without access to free and diverse media, we may never know what happens to the #1 issues in our communities or our country.**

**The Federal Communications Commission (FCC)** was originally created to regulate our media in the public interest - to ensure that our media remain competitive and accountable to local communities, with programming that reflects diverse voices and viewpoints.

**But today, those values are at risk**, as most of our nation's media are controlled by a shrinking handful of giant companies. **This fall, the FCC** is preparing to relax or eliminate limits on how much local and national media these companies can own. Unless we stop them, more mergers - and less diversity - will surely result.

**LET YOUR VOICES BE HEARD!** The FCC is coming to Seattle on **Thursday, November 30th**, to ask us whether we want more consolidated media, or more diversity and accountability. Speak out! Represent your community organization, small business or yourself.

**The FCC's existing media ownership rules** include a cap on national TV ownership, limits on how many radio and TV stations a company can own in a single community, and a ban on newspaper-broadcast cross ownership (see [www.fcc.gov/ownership](http://www.fcc.gov/ownership)). Think about what it would mean to news if our local radio, TV and daily newspapers were owned by the same company... fewer independent reporters, the same stories in different formats, shallow soundbites chosen to appeal to the lowest common denominator.

## How you can help protect our free media:

- 1. ATTEND the FCC Hearing** in Seattle on November 30, 2006; bring colleagues, friends and family.
- 2. TESTIFY at the hearing;** everyone will have 2 minutes to comment.
- 3. WRITE to the FCC.** If you cannot attend, send a letter to the FCC before December 31st. In 2002-2003, we beat back the FCC by sending over 3 million comments to them!
- 4. WRITE to your members of Congress.** Tell the new Congress that you value a fair and free media as essential to the workings of a true democracy.
- 5. COLLECT postcards.** Ask your colleagues, friends and family to fill out comment postcards addressed to the FCC. Bring them to the hearing, return them to Reclaim the Media (address below) or send them directly to the FCC.

## Seattle FCC Hearing

**Thursday, Nov. 30, 2006**

**6pm-9pm**

**Seattle Public Library**

**4th and Madison**

**Downtown Seattle**

A public hearing on media ownership, with FCC Commissioners Michael Copps and Jonathan Adelstein. Hearing sponsored by Reclaim the Media, the *Seattle Times*, KBCS 91.3fm Community Radio and the University of Washington Department of Communications.

For more information about the Seattle hearing and issues concerning media consolidation, visit [www.reclaimthemedial.org](http://www.reclaimthemedial.org)



## The FCC and Media Ownership: Some Background

The FCC is supposed to be our protector, making sure media companies act in the public interest. Unfortunately, powerful business interests are able to use their lobbying clout to persuade the FCC to act in their narrow interests instead. The largest media corporations are pushing the FCC to allow them to grow even larger - to permit more media consolidation. The FCC has pledged to take the public's viewpoints into account as well. Will it? We must make our voices heard.

The five commissioners of the FCC are appointed by the President : three from the President's party and two from the other. In 2003, led by then-Chairman Michael Powell, the FCC succeeded in weakening the media ownership rules in 2002-2003. However, an unexpectedly tremendous public outcry emerged in opposition to the proposed deregulation. Some 3 million comments opposing deregulation poured into the FCC, uniting liberal and consumer groups with religious broadcasters and the NRA. While the FCC ignored these objections and gutted the rules anyway, many Congressional Democrats and Republicans paid heed, and introduced a number of bills that would have partially or completely rolled back the FCC decision. Instead, a federal appeals court rejected the FCC's decision (*Prometheus vs. FCC*), saying that the decision to loosen the ownership rules had been based on flawed data and reasoning.

Now the FCC is back at the drawing board; led by new Chairman Kevin Martin. Martin is expected to push hard to loosen the rules, especially the newspaper-broadcast-ownership ban. He will be much more politic than Powell, but equally focused on doing what the big media companies want, rather than responding to widespread, bipartisan public opinion.

### Ten Reasons why the FCC should not weaken the ownership rules

1. Media consolidation harms democracy.
2. Media consolidation limits free expression.
3. Media consolidation eliminates diversity in media.
4. Media consolidation homogenizes culture.
5. Media consolidation hurts communities.
6. Media consolidation does not produce economic benefits or better service.
7. Media consolidation is not necessary to preserve "failing" or "dying" newspapers.
8. Media consolidation has tended to include indecent/objectionable program content.
9. Media consolidation's ills are not "cured" by the Internet.
10. Media consolidation is not supported by the public or the courts.

### How the FCC should instead make its rules stronger and more aligned with the public interest:

1. The FCC should promote **local ownership** of broadcast outlets.
2. The FCC should promote **ownership opportunities for new broadcasters**, esp. minorities, women and people with disabilities.
3. The FCC should promote **real competition** between multiple outlets and multiple stakeholders in every community, because real competition improves services and lowers costs.