



**Media Minutes**  
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**Producers: Stevie Converse, Megan Tady & Candace Clement**

## **TRANSCRIPT**

### **Disclose the News**

The Federal Communications Commission is considering new rules that would give viewers more information about how broadcasters use the public airwaves.

Broadcasters are obligated to keep public files that provide essential details on how they operate. The rule change would require broadcasters to post these files online in a searchable database. The proposal would also require broadcasters to provide much more information about the nature of their programming. For example, they would need to document how much public interest programming they produce.

Broadcasters are resisting the change, but many public interest advocates are in favor. The FCC's public comment period ended this week. The Public Interest Public Airwaves coalition, which includes Free Press, submitted four petitions totaling 68,000 signatures to the FCC in support of the rule change.

Cheryl Leanza represents the United Church of Christ, a member of the coalition. She said the new rules would make broadcasters more accountable and transparent — which is particularly important during an election season.

**Cheryl Leanza:** *Viewers will be able to find out easily with a few clicks of a mouse online who is buying political advertising, and they'll even be able to find out a little information about these new Super PACs that have been propagated by the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision.*

Leanza said that many people forget that broadcasters use the public airwaves for free. In exchange, they are supposed to produce programming that fits the needs of each community. Tracking whether that happens hasn't been easy — but the new rules could change this, too.

**Cheryl Leanza:** *For example, if you're a local advocate and you're interested in what the mayor is doing to combat crime in your city, you may want to see, well, what are broadcasters doing about that? How can we make sure that the public is getting the right information or that the debate is balanced? When the FCC's new rules come into play,*

*you will be able to go online and see a segment-by-segment breakdown of how much time your local broadcaster spends on local, civic affairs.*

The rules would also require broadcasters to disclose sponsored segments produced by advertisers, allowing viewers to distinguish between fake news and actual reporting. And the rules would also reveal whether stations are engaged in “covert consolidation,” an increasingly common practice in which stations merge operations and air the same newscast on multiple stations.

To find out more, visit [www.savethenews.org/consolidation](http://www.savethenews.org/consolidation).

## **Citizens Inundated**

TV viewers in key election “battleground states” are subjected to as many as 12 political ads an hour on their local TV stations. And the ads will only increase in frequency as Election Day 2012 nears. But how much actual election coverage exists to cut through the misinformation in attack ads and explain political issues in detail?

This election cycle promises to be the most lucrative ever for broadcasters. Thanks to the Supreme Court’s *Citizens United* decision, a flood of political dollars is coming from corporations and wealthy individuals. Up to \$3.3 billion will flow into broadcaster coffers.

**Timothy Karr:** *On the one hand, you have broadcasters profiting immensely from the sale of ad space to these political action committees. And on the other side, they’re not actually doing the type of reporting that would separate fact from fiction and allow voters to make smart decisions when they go to the polls in November.*

Free Press Senior Strategy Director Timothy Karr has written a new report that explores the dependency between those who control political power and those who control the airwaves. Karr takes a close look at how *Citizens United* has given the 1 percent even more power to pick and choose our nation’s leaders – leaving voters on the receiving end of countless ads designed to misinform. The report recommends shoring up quality election reporting and limiting media consolidation to ensure more reporters are on the political beat. Karr also says broadcasters should be required to disclose who bankrolls political ads.

Karr is calling for the Federal Communications Commission to strengthen disclosure rules so that sponsors of the ads would be listed not only in the broadcasters’ political files, but in the body of the ads themselves. And Karr wants something else.

**Timothy Karr:** *That those ads also disclose not just the name of the innocuous organization, but the four principal funders who support that organization. That will tell viewers a lot more about the true intentions of the advertisers in ways that will hopefully make them better informed when they actually make decisions about the issue at hand.*

Karr says there are a lot of organizations doing exceptional work trying to reverse the effects of *Citizens United*. Forcing disclosure in the media is a good way to mitigate some of the ruling's harmful effects.

For more information, and to read Karr's paper, go to [www.freepress.net/democracy](http://www.freepress.net/democracy).  
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