

Resolution of Disapproval

Reps. Jay Inslee (D-Wash.) and Dave Reichert (R-Wash.) introduced bipartisan legislation in March to overturn the Federal Communications Commission's move to lift the 30-year ban on one company owning a newspaper and a broadcast station in the same market. The resolution has strong support from both sides of the aisle.

There is companion legislation in the Senate, introduced by Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) and co-sponsored by a bipartisan group of senators including Ted Stevens (R-Alaska); Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine); John Kerry (D-Mass.) and Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.). The legislation has to pass the Senate within 60 days that Congress is in session. In 2003, the Senate passed a similar resolution of disapproval to overturn the FCC's last attempt to dismantle our nation's media ownership rules.

In 2007, Congress tried to prevent the FCC from moving too hastily on new rules without listening to public input or conducting independent research. Bipartisan legislation was introduced last December to bring greater transparency to the FCC's rulemaking process. It also called on the FCC to first deal with the crisis in female and minority media ownership before considering new rules. Members of the House and Senate on both sides of the aisle called for Chairman Martin to postpone voting on new rules until he addressed these issues.

But the Chairman did not heed their call. Instead, the FCC approved sweeping new rule changes with giant loopholes that would open the door for further consolidation to occur in nearly every market. What's more, at the last minute the FCC granted five new permanent waivers to cross-owned properties owned by Gannett and Media General, a subject Martin never discussed publicly before the vote. In this one action, the FCC granted more permanent waivers than it did during the entire 30-year cross-ownership ban.

The new rules will also place the future of minority ownership in greater jeopardy. People of color own just 3 percent of all TV stations. Nearly 90 percent of those stations are ranked outside the top four in their markets, making them a prime targets for acquisition under the FCC's new rules. The FCC's lack of transparency in conducting the media ownership proceeding is one reason why the House Commerce Committee is currently conducting an investigation of the FCC.

The Congressional Review Act provides specific procedures under which Congress can, by joint resolution, disapprove an agency rule. The Resolution of Disapproval currently being considered by both the House and the Senate would nullify the FCC's new rules and send the agency back to the drawing board. This is a chance for Congress to take a stand for more competition, more local news, and a more diverse media across America.