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# United States Senate

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September 20, 2007

The Honorable Kevin J. Martin  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Martin:

I am writing to support Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein's call for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to create an independent task force to examine proposals to increase minority media ownership prior to moving forward with current rulemaking on media consolidation. I appreciate the hard work of Commissioners Jonathan Adelstein and Michael J. Copps in advocating for proposals that will increase minority media ownership.

The lack of diversity in our nation's radio and television media ownership is a far cry from the reality in which we live. According to recent studies by the nonprofit group Free Press even though people of color make up 35 percent of the U.S. population they own just 8 percent of all local radio stations and 3 percent of all local TV stations. Free Press also found that the more concentrated a broadcast market, the less chance a minority owner has of breaking into the market.

It is clearly in the best interest of our democracy that media ownership reflects the wealth of this nation's diversity. As a public trustee of the broadcast and wireless spectrum, it is the responsibility of the FCC to advocate on behalf of minority and women in the radio and television broadcast industry by working to remove the increasingly onerous obstacles to ownership these groups currently face. Unfortunately, the FCC has not lived up to its responsibilities in recent years. As a result, minority ownership rates in the broadcast industry and diversity in programming have suffered.

In 2000, the FCC released five studies conducted to help the commission comply with its own regulations that require the elimination of market-entry barriers for small business. These studies largely found that media consolidation negatively impacted minority ownership, and noted that minority owners face historic barriers to accessing capital from lending institutions to purchase broadcast outlets. Like my colleagues Senators John Kerry and Barack Obama, who last year called on the FCC to address the issue of minority ownership before dealing with the larger media consolidation issue, I find it troubling that the FCC took 4 years to issue a notice for public comment on those studies.

I am equally disturbed that the FCC has not provided the public with enough time to properly examine the pending proposals on minority ownership prior to the FCC going forward with current rulemaking on media consolidation. As required by the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the FCC solicited recommendations on ways to increase minority ownership. On August 1, 2007, the FCC issued a notice of proposed rulemaking seeking public comment on these longstanding recommendations to increase minority broadcast ownership made by several well-respected minority media advocacy organizations. But the FCC only gave the public until October 1 to provide comments on the more than 30 proposals that were submitted. Two months is simply not enough time to properly examine the value of these proposals and the impact that the broader media consolidation will have on minority ownership. I believe this hasty deadline is symptomatic of the current state of neglect when it comes to the issue of minority ownership, particularly in light of the significant changes the FCC is considering in regard to broader media ownership rules.

Therefore, I respectfully request the FCC create an independent and diverse task force to examine proposals to increase minority ownership prior to moving forward with current rulemaking on media consolidation. It is my hope that this task force will finally generate some much-needed action to confront the crisis facing minority media ownership that exists today.

This is an issue that I and my fellow colleagues in the Senate will continue to closely monitor. I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



ROBERT MENENDEZ  
United States Senator