

Remarks from **Jonathan Adelstein,** FCC Commissioner

Excerpted from his speech at the 2005 IPA conference

We can all agree that freedom and democracy are the fundamental values we stand for as a nation. For all the talk we hear about these values, though, it is the small and independent press that are actually working to uplift the quality of freedom and democracy in this country.

Thousands of people across the country have told me they have an appetite for a more nourishing media environment. There is a lot of disgust with what I've called the "McDonaldization" of the American media. The endless drive for more concentration in print and broadcast outlets not only "McDonaldizes" the media, it "supersizes" it.

The publications of IPA members are nourishing and sustaining the appetite that many still have for a more balanced and nutritious media diet. Your work is vital to our democracy functioning at its best. For those people who demand a more in-depth and diverse press, you are providing an alternative to the who-said-what coverage in the Scott Peterson and Michael Jackson trials, the incessant speculation of what went wrong between Brad and Jen, and the recent spate of paid-for commentaries.

At the FCC, one of my fundamental responsibilities is to protect the peoples' airwaves – both

for TV and radio. For me, this means working for a diversity of viewpoints over the air, and paying attention to the need of local communities. The public must receive something in return for the free use of their airwaves. We owe it to the American people to take this charge seriously and not let "supersized" media steamroll our democracy.

Those who oppose media concentration have overcome enormous challenges in the past two years as the FCC, the agency entrusted to protect the airwaves, attempted to strip away regulatory safeguards so big media could get even bigger. Those rules would have allowed single owners to cross-pollinate their commonly-owned TV stations and newspapers with homogenized messages.

Nearly three million people contacted the FCC to voice their opposition to more media consolidation. Since its June 2003 decision to roll back media ownership limits, the FCC has

been rebuked by the public, by Congress, and by the courts. And we won. A federal court has put that decision on hold and demanded the FCC start from scratch. This gives us a second chance to get it right. This time, we need to make sure the FCC learned the lessons of this battle, so we don't end up with another stealth process and a similar result.

Meanwhile, the public will increasingly turn to publications like those represented by IPA when they need to receive truly investigative, thoughtful and incisive pieces. Your daily fight to be heard despite powerful efforts to drown out your competing voices is recognized and appreciated.

I know a number of you have probably joined the broad coalition of consumer, public interest, labor and other groups forming around the Bill of Citizens' Media Rights. The public interest will only prevail through a strong voice in Washington, and this is one way among many that you may decide to take part. The more stories that are scooped by those outside the mainstream media, the more the public will wonder why the sources they frequently rely on are missing the mark. In this age of consolidation and



homogenization, your publications have a real opportunity to convey accurate information, to change opinion, and lead the way toward a stronger, more balanced democracy.

The struggle for freedom and democracy is every bit as real here in America as it is overseas. While I may be your watchdog in Washington, you are the foot-soldiers who are fighting that struggle every day. We do our best when we work together. Let's build on the remarkable successes we have achieved in the last two years, and help ensconce those principles that promote our values in our nation's media laws and regulations. ■

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