

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 5, 2012

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1589
Ownership

The Honorable Julius Genachowski
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Genachowski,

Vibrant public dialogue – facilitated by a diverse array of media outlets – has long been a cornerstone of American Democracy. Even more central to our national identity is our capacity to question, stand up, and speak out. No entity, no matter how wealthy or powerful, can be allowed to silence the voices of individual Americans and their patchwork of communities that hold this great country together. Being the primary source of news across America, broadcast media plays a vital role in informing and shaping public discourse. Further consolidation of this industry presents a serious and immediate threat to our democratic process.

Before the Commission changes its media ownership rules, it must fully consider the impact of any further consolidation in order to satisfy its obligation to serve the public interest, and also to comply with the mandate of the Third Circuit Court of Appeals reviewing the Commission's decisions on this question. While we appreciate the Commission providing a comment period on its summary ownership statistics, this does not meet the Third Circuit Court's standard regarding media ownership diversity. The court instructed the FCC to study the impact on female and minority ownership before making any rule change. The FCC has a responsibility to fully analyze how this proposed rule change will affect the communities who have been denied an ownership stake in our media system for far too long. We urge the FCC to conduct the thoughtful and thorough analysis this question deserves before moving forward with a rule change that could have a detrimental impact on ownership diversity.

We have been and remain concerned with this pattern of increased concentration and lessened diversity for many reasons, not least of which is the fact that many of our constituents still depend heavily on TV and radio broadcasts for their news and information. Broadcast media continues to be the primary source of local news, with 74 percent of adults getting local news from local TV stations, 51 percent getting it from radio broadcasts, and 50 percent from local newspapers.

While local broadcast media remain an important source of information for our constituents, these outlets often do not reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. Women and people of color historically held very few licenses for radio and television stations, and these numbers remain shockingly low. The Commission very recently released new data indicating that ownership of broadcast outlets does not reflect our nation's growing diversity. Women hold less than 7 percent of all full-power commercial radio and television broadcast licenses, while racial and ethnic minorities control only 3.6 percent of such TV stations and 8 percent of such radio stations.

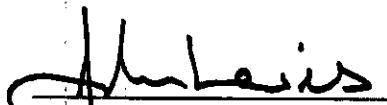
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Despite these numbers, we are led to believe that the Commission may once again relax its cross-ownership rules. Reports suggest that these changes could include lifting a ban on allowing newspapers to own a TV station in the same market in which they publish. These rule changes and others appear to be largely the same as those proposed by former Chairman Kevin Martin in 2007 – and that Congressional Democrats, along with the Third Circuit Court of Appeals and the public at large resoundingly rejected. It is our understanding that a vote on this latest round of proposed rule changes could even occur in the next several weeks, without any public hearings or discussions on these proposals.

Little if anything has changed since the Commission last proposed such rule changes in 2007. The recently released ownership report provides some long-absent data, but the numbers paint a bleak picture. The Commission has not adequately addressed the likely impact of any proposed rule changes on diversity, as the Third Circuit has repeatedly required of the Commission's actions in this proceeding. We are concerned that already low levels of ownership will be diminished even further by the proposed rule changes. Further consolidation would harm the entire media system, but have a disproportionate impact on diverse owners and the communities they serve.

For all of these reasons, we respectfully request that the Commission not proceed with its proposed rule changes at this time, and that it seeks further analysis and comment on its recently released data before it acts on its media ownership rules.

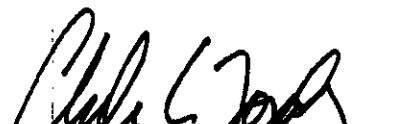
Sincerely,


JOHN LEWIS


EMANUEL CLEAVER


KEITH ELLISON


RAUL M. GRIJALVA


CHARLES A. GONZALEZ


LOUISE M. SLAUGHTER

Maxine Waters
Representative Maxine Waters (CA-35th)

Alcee Hastings
Representative Alcee Hastings (FL-23rd)

Hansen Clarke
Representative Hansen Clarke (MI-13th)

Sheila Jackson-Lee
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(TX-18th)

Yvette Clarke
Representative Yvette Clarke (NY-11th)

Gwen Moore
Representative Gwen Moore (WI-4th)

William "Lacy" Clay, Jr.
Representative William "Lacy" Clay, Jr.
(MO-1st)

Laura Richardson
Representative Laura Richardson
(CA-37th)

Elijah Cummings
Representative Elijah Cummings (MD-7th)

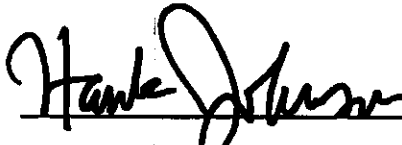
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Representative Terri Sewell (AL-7th)

Danny K. Davis
Representative Danny K. Davis (IL-7th)

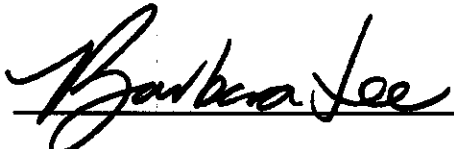
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Representative Bennie Thompson
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Chaka Fattah
Representative Chaka Fattah (PA-2nd)

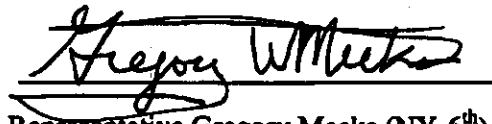
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Representative Edolphus Towns (NY-10th)


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 (GA-4th)



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 (VA-3rd)

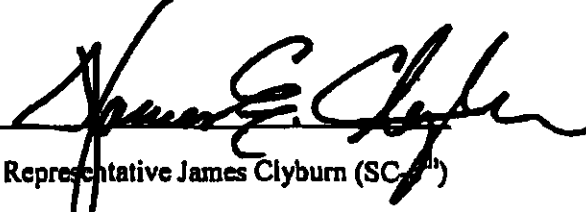

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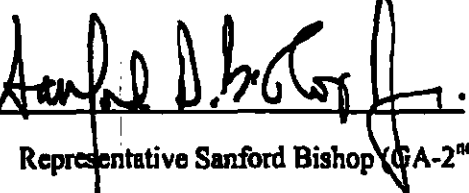

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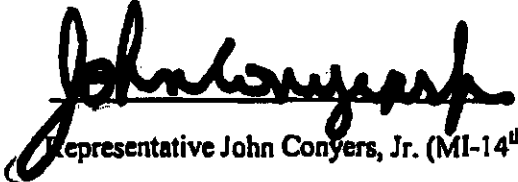

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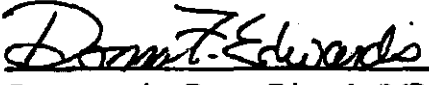

Representative Karen Bass (CA-33)

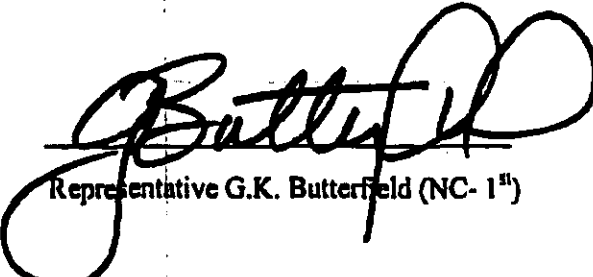

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Representative Sanford Bishop (GA-2nd)


Representative John Conyers, Jr. (MI-14th)


Representative Corrine Brown (FL-3rd)



Representative Donna Edwards (MD-4th)

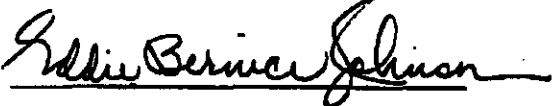

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