

Unions oppose FCC push to consolidate media ownership

SEATTLE — Union members were among an estimated 1,000 people attending a town hall meeting here Nov. 9. Most of them were there to tell the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) not to go forward with a plan to consolidate big media.

The FCC is considering sweeping changes to media ownership rules that would allow media conglomerates to swallow up more local radio and television stations and newspapers. A single company could own the major daily newspaper, and as many as eight radio stations and three TV stations in a city.

Reportedly, FCC Chairman Kevin Martin plans to seek a commission vote by Dec. 18 on the proposed regulations. A majority of the commissioners on the FCC were appointed by President Bush.

A previous effort to relax media regulations was led by former FCC chairman Michael Powell — son of

then-Bush Secretary of State Colin Powell. The plan was tossed out by the federal appellate court in Philadelphia because the FCC held no hearings on it.

The FCC resurrected the plan, this time holding hearings in Los Angeles; Nashville, Tenn.; Harrisburg, Pa.; Tampa, Fla.; Chicago, Ill. and Seattle.

The FCC in 2003 wiped out decades-old limits on the number of local TV, radio and newspaper outlets a corporation could own, but a bipartisan majority in the Senate voted to overturn the rule changes with Congress eventually reaching a compromise — limiting the number of stations one company could own to 39 percent of the national audience. Since then, growing media consolidation has resulted in increasing lack of diversity both in the content produced and those producing it.

In Oregon, Musicians Local 99 and Communication Workers of America

Local 7901 have led the fight against media consolidation. The two unions helped pass a resolution at the Oregon AFL-CIO convention in October opposing the FCC proposal.

“Our unions and the general public suffer from under reporting of labor issues and misinformation influenced by corporate America,” the unions said. “The frontline workers most affected include journalists, musicians, writers, artists, actors and telecommunication workers.”

Washington U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell (D) sent a recorded statement to the Seattle town hall expressing concern over the impact media concentration would have on Northwest communities. Cantwell has co-sponsored the “Media Ownership Act of 2007,” a bipartisan bill that would put the brakes on the FCC proposal.

At a breakfast with union officials in August, Oregon U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith was asked about media consolidation. He told union leaders consolidation is being driven by expansion of the Information Age.

“In the Information Age in which we live, you can get newspapers online. You have 200 TV channels and AM, FM, FM2 and AM2, XM Radio and Band Radio,” Smith said.

“Don’t lose any sleep over (media mogul) Rupert Murdoch. You have endless choices.”

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Local Motion

October 2007

Union activity in Oregon and Southwest Washington, according to the National Labor Relations Board and the Oregon Employment Relations Board

Election results

Company	Date	Union	Location	Results:		
				Union	No Union	
Rosemont Residential Training Center & School	10/10	SEIU Local 503	Portland	37	8	
Hanard Machine	10/12	Carpenters Industrial Council	Salem	20	50	
Apria Healthcare	10/29	Teamsters Local 81	Portland	7	12	

Representation petitions

Company	Union	Location	# of employees
Fred Meyer		The Dalles	
United Food & Commercial Workers Local 555			70
US Metal Works		Sandy	
Iron Workers Local 516			26
First Student		Sandy	
Teamsters Local 206			41
Paragon Systems (decertification)		Portland	
Security, Police, & Fire Professionals of America Local 50			105
Allied Waste of Portland		Portland	
Teamsters Local 305			19

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