Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 16, 2006

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

Dear Chairman Martin:

Today the Senate Commerce Committee approved the nomination of Robert M. McDowell to be the fifth Commissioner to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and we expect that the full Senate will act soon on this nomination. We anticipate that with a full slate of commissioners that your agency will soon move forward to begin the process of revisiting the media ownership rules. We write today to urge you to consider media ownership as a comprehensive order, and not deal with these rules in a piecemeal fashion.

As you know, a bipartisan group of Senators has expressed many concerns about increasing media consolidation and its impact on our democracy. Indeed, after the FCC approved sweeping rules changes in 2003, the Senate approved, by a bipartisan vote of 55 to 40, a resolution sponsored by ourselves and twenty other Senators to roll back those rules.

As the Commission reconsiders media ownership rules, it is crucial that the process is as open and informative as possible and that it involves the American people in meaningful ways. It is critical that we have a comprehensive rulemaking so that the public can understand how all the media ownership rules will operate in conjunction with another. For example, communities will be greatly affected by a newspaper/broadcast cross-ownership rule, and also by a rule that permits ownership of multiple television stations by one company in a single market. These rules must be considered together because each one has a significant impact on the diversity of voices, or lack of diversity, a community will have.

As you know, more than two million Americans contacted the Commission about media consolidation in 2003. Clearly, the public understands that any change to the rules that govern media ownership will have a tremendous impact on what they watch, hear and read. But if the Commission divides the ownership proceeding into multiple discrete rules considered over time, the public may overlook important consequences of individual rules. The American people have a right to see all the rules under consideration in their full context.

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Any new media ownership rules established by the Commission will be interconnected, and thus must be considered in a comprehensive way. We urge you to allow this process to happen in as open and transparent a manner as possible, as well as engaging in public hearings and comment.

Sincerely,

Byron L. Dorgan

Trent Lott

Kay Bailey Hutchison

Jim F. Kerry

Olympia Snowe

Cc: Commissioner Michael J. Copps
Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein
Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate