

Fake News Is Only the Beginning. The FCC Votes to Let Monopolies Decide What Local News You See

Ten years from now, people could look at their local news reporting and wonder how it ever went so wrong. You've heard of fake news? You ain't seen nothing yet.

By [Sue Wilson](#)

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What would happen if the politician you love to hate were indicted, but your local news didn't report it? No newspaper stories, no TV news, no radio news on the hour, nothing.

Couldn't happen? Think again.

The Republican-controlled Federal Communications Commission voted on Nov. 16 to allow just one corporation to own the local newspaper plus nearly every commercial TV station in your town. Nifty way to reduce down to just one newsroom then dictate whatever information that corporation does — and does not — want you to know in this democracy.

It's exactly what's happened with radio. Back in the day when lots of companies owned 40 radio stations, the broadcast industry made big promises that local information would be much more diverse if they could simply own many more stations. The 1996 Telecommunications Act resulted in a handful of corporations owning thousands of stations — and force feeding conservative programming down our country's throats ever since, no debate, no opposing opinions allowed.

The Media Action Center showed during the Scott Walker recall in Wisconsin that "conservative" radio giants there gave millions of dollars in free airtime to the GOP candidate — while refusing to allow a single Democrat on the air at all. GOP operatives there still gloat about radio winning elections for them. After 21 years of this kind of divisive public policy, 60 million people listen to conservative radio, about the same number that voted for Donald Trump.

Now the FCC is quietly trying to do the same thing to our local TV stations. In 2003, when they just tried to allow TV stations to own newspapers, 3 million people rose up and said "No!" Now they want to allow the newspapers plus all the TV stations in one town to have the same owner, and they're not even asking for public comment.

Meanwhile, FCC Commissioners are in a PR frenzy to have us believe TV is dying. Chair Ajit V. Pai tweeted

"Among Americans aged 18-29, online streaming is primary means of watching TV."

Commissioner Michael O’Rielly, citing Pew Research, writes:

“By 2016, only 46 percent of respondents viewed broadcast TV as a source of news and 38 percent ‘got news yesterday’ from an online source,” then talks about people getting news from Google and Facebook.

But what matters is not whether we stream on a device or watch on a big screen. What matters is the integrity and diversity of our information.

Google and Facebook don’t produce news or hire reporters to ferret out what’s going on at City Hall or the state Capitol or White House. That’s the terrain of newspapers and TV broadcasters.

Independent online news organizations are growing, but their influence is negligible: According to August 2017 Pew studies, about 52 million people watch local TV news, compared to about 23 million who access digitally produced news, but those 23 million people may visit the online news sites just once a month — for an average of just 2.4 minutes. The FCC’s argument doesn’t hold up.

So why does the broadcast industry want the FCC to consolidate to such an alarming degree? It’s not money. Fortune Magazine cites record industry profits, with BIA/Kelsey reporting that local television station revenue reached \$28.4 billion in 2016. They’re rolling in the dough, so why the sudden push to change things?

We know why. We know why Sinclair Broadcasting, renowned for its alt-right editorializing over our public airwaves, wants to reach 72 percent of U.S. homes with its propaganda. We know this

White House’s agenda. We know what happens when we allow just a few companies to control everything we read, see and hear. We know.

Media reform group Free Press President Craig Aaron says if the FCC doesn’t abandon this plan,

“they’ll find themselves back in court for failing to study the issue, take public input, and address the fact that so few stations are owned by women and people of color. We’ve won this fight before, and we can prevail again.”

They won this fight before because 3 million Americans stood up for free speech.

Stand up. You can email the FCC, call your representatives in Congress and support Free Press’ legal case. Find links at MediaActionCenter.net.

This is a watershed moment. Ten years from now, people could look at their local news reporting and wonder how it ever went so wrong. You’ve heard of fake news? You ain’t seen nothing yet.

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