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## [FCC Will Review Media Ownership Rules](#)

- By MICHAEL J. SNIFFEN, Associated Press Writer

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(06-21) 16:20 PDT WASHINGTON, (AP) --

The Federal Communications Commission voted Wednesday to review its media ownership rules, though the panel's two Democrats objected that the process won't ensure enough public comment on specific proposals.

With a Republican majority in place after a vacancy had produced months of deadlock, the commission finally reopened the hotly disputed issue of limits on the number of radio and television stations that one owner can have and the limits on cross-ownership between newspapers and broadcasters.

The rules are of great concern to giant media companies in an era of mergers and convergence of print and broadcast media inside individual companies. But they also affect every American through their impact on the credibility of news outlets, on the quality of public debate and on "whether TV and radio offer entertainment that is creative, uplifting and local or degrading, banal and homogenized," said Commissioner Michael J. Copps, one of the Democrats.

Federal law requires a review every four years. Additionally, the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals suspended all the changes the commission made in 2003 and sent most of them back for re-evaluation on grounds that the FCC compiled an insufficient record to justify them.

The three Republican commissioners set new procedures for addressing the thorny issues.

"We'll make sure to gather a fuller record," Chairman Kevin J. Martin said. "We're going to do more studies and more hearings than have been done before. ... We're going to have a longer comment period, so we're going to try to seek greater public input."

Martin has supported eliminating the three-decade-old flat ban on cross-ownership and in April called on newspaper publishers to help justify repeal. He noted Wednesday that the 3rd Circuit did conclude the FCC was right to remove that blanket prohibition on newspapers owning broadcast outlets in the cities they serve, even though it suspended that revision along with the other 2003 changes.

But Martin didn't say what might replace the ban or even predict "what rules, if any, we're going to make changes to."



The commission is planning six public hearings around the country on issues like local coverage, minority ownership, programming for children, religious programming, arts programming and needs of rural and disabled Americans.

The FCC has allowed 120 days for public comment and allocated \$200,000 for studies of issues such as how people get news, competition between media types, marketplace changes, local coverage, minority participation in media and production of children's programming.

No one on the FCC or its staff would predict how long the process might take.

While supporting a review, both Democrats recorded partial dissents.

They said the review designed by the majority didn't envision enough public hearings, in-depth studies of issues like local coverage and minority ownership, or a firm commitment to let the public see and comment on specific rule changes before they are adopted.

They predicted that without such provisions any new rules could meet the same fate in court the last ones did. The suspended revisions from 2003 would have allowed one corporation to own — in a single community — up to three TV stations, eight radio stations, the cable system, the only daily newspaper and the biggest Internet provider, Copps said.

"Americans know the difference between a fig leaf and a real commitment," said Copps.

"If you see FCC commissioners come to listen to your point of view personally, instead of expecting you to hire a \$500-an-hour lobbyist to get heard, you'll know," he said. "And, critically, if the FCC shows you the specific rules that will reshape the American media before forcing a vote, instead of rushing from this short document to a final vote, you'll know."

Copps said he wanted at least a dozen public hearings.

Democratic Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein called the plans "thin gruel to those hoping for a meaty discussion of media ownership issues."

"The large media companies wanted, and today they get, a blank check to permit further media consolidation," Adelstein said.

Andrew Jay Schwartzman, head of Media Access Project, a law firm for citizens groups that won the 3rd Circuit ruling, criticized the FCC for not completing a study of local issues before proceeding. The FCC said 80,000 comments submitted in that inquiry would be evaluated in the new review of ownership rules.

Paul Levinson, Fordham University's communications department chairman, praised the FCC for starting the ownership review "rather than pursuing its unconstitutional witchhunt for broadcasters who allegedly present 'indecent' material."

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