



Putting It in Context

The Next Debates

Now a new and more diverse set of critical debates looms on the horizon. When combined with the public interest obligations and media ownership decisions, the outcome of these debates will have breathtaking consequences for the future of media in America. Increasing media concentration and the policies that ignore public interest obligations threaten to exclude and silence voices and choices critical to an informed and participatory democracy. At the same time, there are an emerging set of issues that could – if harnessed, defined, and championed – help stem the trend toward greater concentration and fewer media obligations by giving consumers more open communications choices and more diverse media voices.

These emerging policy debates have the potential to give power and freedom back to the individual through a more open media policy.

Policymakers must address a number of key questions to shape this future:

1. **Jumpstarting Wireless Broadband Opportunity.** How can Congress accelerate the digital television transition, freeing up valuable public spectrum while also maximizing public benefits by ensuring a) that no one is left behind in the transition, b) that at least a portion of auction proceeds are used to benefit public interest media, and c) that the public benefits through an expansion of unlicensed wireless spectrum?
2. **Expanding Consumer Media Choices.** How will Congress use the power of competition and consumer choice to improve media choices and voices – will it expand consumer choice and competition on all platforms?

5. **Extending the Openness of the Internet into the Broadband World.** What will prevent media concentration and consolidation from being extended to the Internet and the digital realm if open networks are allowed to be replaced with closed networks or rule changes allow bottleneck control over the voices and choices that consumers have access to? Will consumers continue to be allowed to openly connect any device, application, or service to their networks?
6. **Expanding the Frontiers of Public Media.** At a time when the public needs open and independent sources of news, information, and programming, how will public broadcasting be funded over the long run? And how will noncommercial stations make the transition to the digital age?

These are a few of the critical questions that will shape our media future and determine how, when, and if the public benefits from communications policy

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3. **Giving Communities New Radio Voices.** Will community groups be allowed to benefit from new low-power FM radio stations that enable them to reach out to their own communities via ordinary radio signals within a three-to-seven mile diameter?
4. **Allowing Consumers to Get the Media They Choose.** Should consumers continue to be forced to purchase cable channels they don't want, or should they be allowed to openly pick and choose the content they want?

choices. Because never has there been so much at stake for the public in media policy, the public has an opportunity to get involved by preserving, protecting, and strengthening the public space in our nation's media environment.

As new technology innovations unlock new potential, policymakers must not lose sight of the goal on the horizon – ensuring that America's media choices serve the public's growing and very real needs.

How Congress has Ensured that Other Media Also Serve the Public Interest:

- **Direct Broadcast Satellite** providers must reserve four percent of their channel capacity exclusively for noncommercial programming of an educational or informational nature.¹
- **Telephone** providers must pay into, and can also get paid from, a universal service system that ensures rural Americans, the poor, schools, and libraries can get affordable access to telecommunications.²
- **Cable** providers are required to set aside channel capacity for local public, educational, and governmental (PEG) access programming, but the amount of local programming is not federally mandated.³