SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE RESOLUTION 159—EXPRESSING THE SENSE OF THE SENATE THAT THE JUNE 2, 2003, RULING OF THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION WEAKENING THE NATION'S MEDIA OWNERSHIP RULES IS NOT IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST AND SHOULD BE RESCINDED

Mr. PRYOR (for himself, Mr. KENNEDY, Mr. EDWARDS, Mrs. LINCOLN, Mr. GRAHAM of Florida, Mr. REED, Mr. BINGAMAN, Mr. LEAHY, Ms. LANDRIEU, Mr. JEFFORDS, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. BAUCUS, Mr. CARPER, and Mrs. MURRAY) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation:

S. RES. 159

Whereas the Federal Communications Commission moved with unreasonable haste in considering the issue of media concentration and did not previously disclose the proposed ownership rule the Commission implemented in its June 2, 2003, ruling on media ownership rules;

Whereas the Commission did not provide an opportunity for the public to review, debate, and comment on the proposed changes prior to the ruling;

Whereas it would have been appropriate for the Commission to include such public review, debate, and comment on the specific provisions of its proposal prior to issuing a ruling with such broad implications;

Whereas there is no indication that the Commission has adequately addressed the impact of the proposed ownership rule changes on industry market share and consumer prices;

Whereas greater media concentration could threaten the diversity of and extent of local content in broadcast programming and news, and has the potential to inhibit or remove local control over such programming;

Whereas, despite the rapid growth of vital Spanish-language media outlets in the past several years, there is no indication that the Commission considered treating Spanish-language media separately for purposes of its broadcast media ownership restrictions, thereby failing to extend to Spanish speakers the same protections afforded members of the English-speaking broadcast community; and

Whereas it is in the public interest to maintain local control and promote diversity in television programming, which the previous ownership rules had been designed to ensure: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That it is the sense of the Senate that the June 2, 2003, ruling of the Federal Communications Commission weakening the Nation's media ownership rules is not in the public interest and should be rescinded.

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, lying on the desk before us is a resolution relating to the Federal Communications Commission's June 2, 2003, ruling weakening the Nation's media ownership rules. I say very emphatically that those rules are not in the public interest and should be rescinded. I have laid that on the desk for my colleagues. I encourage all Members to get a copy of that and read it. I respectfully request that if anyone wants to be a cosponsor, I would love to have them cosponsor that today.

As we all know, 2 days ago, the Federal Communications Commission by a vote of 3 to 2 rolled back longstanding rules governing media ownership. This ruling eases the ban on cross-ownership of newspapers, television stations, and radio stations, and allows media corporations to own more outlets locally and nationwide.

The new rules have the potential of placing significant control over what the public sees and hears and reads in the hands of a small number of media conglomerates. Ultimately, having a few entities control a vast percentage of the American media market will stifle the diversity of ideas, viewpoints, and opinions.

It reminds me a little bit of Henry Ford who at one point told his customers that could order any color they wanted as long as it was black. I feel the same way—that we may be getting to that point with regard to our media; that we can see and read and hear anything we want as long as it comes through them.

The diversity of viewpoints is critical to our democracy. It is one of the foundations of American society and the American system of government. One thing we believe very strongly in America is the marketplace of ideas—a free and open and robust marketplace of ideas where people can exchange ideas and concepts freely and openly and not have that go through a national corporate conglomeration.

I am very confident that this proposed rule change sets the stage for homegeniztion—not diversification but homogenization. That is not a good thing for this country. It is not a good thing for our system.

Supporters of the FCC ruling say that the large media mergers do not stifle diversity. What they say is you can turn on cable right now and you get dozens—maybe hundreds—of channels in some systems, or you can turn on a radio station. But let me say this. Is it really diversity when the ideologies, the principles, and the viewpoints are being presented through the myopic lens of a singular, cookie-cutter point of view? I am concerned that is where we are getting to today with this ruling that will rush us headlong into this calamity.

I think if the majority of Americans look at this issue they would understand that it does; that this ruling does not promote diversity but, in fact, limits it.

There is a broad array of special interest groups, of consumer advocates, of civil rights and religious groups, small business, whatever—a broad array of interests—that are opposed. They are opposed to this ruling for very sound reasons. That is why I rise today to offer this resolution.

I also wish to take this moment to publicly support the efforts of Senator TED STEVENS and Senator FRITZ HOLLINGS because they are taking the lead in trying to codify the 35-percent ownership cap. I am not only supportive of their legislation but I am also a cosponsor.

This resolution is in no way competition to that but, in my view, this resolution is a logical extension of their efforts. It is unfortunate that we have to come here today to consider resolutions and legislation on this issue. The frustrations and the hostility out there in the public domain about this ruling and about corporate ownership of media outlets has been exacerbated by the FCC's inability to communicate to the public in rational terms and explain why this proposal is a good idea.

In spite of 2 years of study, we need more time to study this. So far, the advocates of this position have made a very unconvincing case.

One thing we need to understand in this country is that there is a fundamental difference in owning and operating a newspaper and in owning and operating regular television stations. Anyone today, if they chose to, could start a newspaper. All you really need in today's world is the ability to do some desk-top publishing and get out there and have a way to distribute your publication. But to have a radio station or a television station requires a license from the Government. That license is a sacred trust. It is a trust that they are going to have broadcasts in the community interest. They are going to have the programming that the community wants. They are going to play a vital role in our system when it comes to news and information and getting information out to the public which is important for them to have.

One example of the FCC's shortcoming on this issue is the fact that the FCC has made no case for examining the Spanish language media as a separate market. I think everybody in this room understands it is a separate market. But because they have not seen it as a separate market, they look at mergers and acquisitions and their analysis is skewed in favor of the merger and the acquisition.

Thank you, Mr. President and other Members of the Senate, for the indulgence and this time.

I would like to remind everyone that this is out here for everyone to look at. I would very much appreciate as many cosponsors as we could have. I think it is important that the Senate send a very clear message on this topic.

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 48—SUPPORTING THE GOALS AND IDEALS OF ''NATIONAL EPILEPSY AWARENESS MONTH'' AND URGING FUNDING FOR EPILEPSY RESEARCH AND SERVICE PROGRAMS

Mrs. LINCOLN (for herself, Ms. COLLINS, Mr. CRAIG, Ms. LANDRIEU, Ms. CANTWELL, and Mr. DEWINE) submitted the following concurrent resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary: