

August 30, 1999

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION**

The Portals

445 12th Street S.W.

WASHINGTON, DC 20554

**In The Matter Of :**                    )           **Docket No. MM 99-25**

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Creation Of A

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Docket No. RM-9208;

Low Power Radio Service

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Docket No. RM-9242

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**REPLY COMMENTS OF THE  
GREEN PARTY OF MICHIGAN**

We commend the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for initiating, in FCC Docket MM 99-25, a Proposed Rule to establish a Low Power Radio Service (LPRS). The LPRS would provide licenses for radio stations which are small enough to be affordable for everyday Americans and small non-profit groups. LPRS stations would also be sized to present FOCUSED programming for SPECIFIC COMMUNITIES -- as opposed to standardized, ALowest Common Denominator≡ programming for metropolitan areas (or even LARGER areas).

The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and National Public Radio (NPR) have all filed Written Comments which oppose an LPRS. In response, we stress that Low Power Radio is strongly supported by The Green Party of Michigan.

## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE GREEN PARTY OF MICHIGAN**

The Green Party of Michigan is part of an organized international movement to build a better world. For us, the route to this better world includes protection and restoration of our natural environment, social justice, conflict resolution by peaceful means, individual empowerment and -- as the philosophical foundation for it all -- an abiding concern for the generations, human and non-human alike, who will follow us on this planet.

Greens can be found in 80 different countries. Our own Green Party, here in Michigan, is affiliated with the nationwide Association of State Green Parties. This group, in turn, is part of the Federation of the Greens of the Americas and is linked officially with the European Federation of Green Parties.

State and national Green Parties are operationally autonomous but linked by philosophy. We follow our own advice to *Think globally, act locally.*≡

All Green Parties, everywhere, are united by TEN KEY VALUES:

- \* **Ecological Wisdom**
- \* **Social Justice**
- \* **Grassroots Democracy**
- \* **Nonviolence**
- \* **Decentralization**
- \* **Community-based Economics**
- \* **Feminism**
- \* **Respect for Diversity**
- \* **Personal and Global Responsibility**
- \* **Future Focus/Sustainability**

At a MINIMUM, Low Power Radio would advance -- DIRECTLY -- the Key Values of Social Justice, Grassroots Democracy, Decentralization and Community-based Economics. By allowing more viewpoints (SOME of them progressive) to circulate on the airwaves, Low Power Radio could also INDIRECTLY advance most or all of the other Key Values as well.

## **THE CASE FOR LOW POWER RADIO**

The case for establishing a Low Power Radio Service is compelling. Educational institutions and individual citizens were once allowed to broadcast at 100 watts or less (as opposed to 50,000 to 100,000 watts for many conventional radio stations today). Such Low Power Radio stations, with signal ranges of 4 or 5 miles at most, were ideally suited to serve specific communities and/or offer alternatives to ALowest Common Denominator≡ radio programming.

In 1978, however, the FCC stopped issuing licenses for radio stations in this size range. Un-licensed operation of such a Low Power Radio station became punishable by fines, seizure of property or even imprisonment.

In 1996, the United States Congress enacted, and President Clinton signed into law, so-called Areform≡ legislation which eased previous restrictions on ownership of multiple radio stations, allowed more opportunities for cross-media acquisitions AND mandated that all commercial radio licenses must be awarded to the highest bidder, without regard for media diversity or any other aspects of Athe public interest≡.

As a direct result of these policy changes by Washington, a single corporation can (and sometimes does) control half of the radio frequencies in a given metropolitan area, PLUS local newspapers and TV stations as well. As another direct result of these policy changes, local stations in many small cities and rural areas have been driven off the air OR replaced by satellite-using stations that provide standardized programming from hundreds of miles away.

As a further direct result of these Federal policy changes, corporate acquisitions have driven from the airwaves hundreds of voices that once enriched media diversity, including Spanish language stations, stations owned by non-profit community groups and Niche market commercial stations.

Now we have reached the point at which 4 media giants receive 90% of all dollars spent on radio advertising in America. They are using their new market power to increase the number of advertisements on the air, while simultaneously raising advertising rates to levels that most small businesses cannot afford. In addition, some of these same corporations, joined by other established broadcasters, have initiated major strategic acquisitions on the Internet -- AND are now asking Congress to remove COMPLETELY the remaining legal restrictions on their power to acquire whatever they want.

In short, the free flow of ideas in America, over the public airwaves, has been shrinking -- AND is in danger of shrinking much further. CONCERN about the restricted flow of ideas in modern media has even led some otherwise law-abiding Americans to engage in Un-licensed Low Power Radio broadcasting, despite the risk of fines, property seizure and even imprisonment.

Now, fortunately, the FCC itself has declared an urgent need to correct this situation -- AND has recently proposed establishment of a Low Power Radio Service as a PARTIAL response.

We strongly encourage the Commission to proceed with licensing of Low Power Radio stations, generally setting power ceilings at 100 watts -- plus reasonable variations, down or up, in areas with high or low population density.

Such Low Power Radio licenses should be open to all who have been under-represented in -- or totally excluded from -- the present regulatory system, including individual entrepreneurs and non-profit community groups.

In particular, Low Power Radio licenses should be awarded in a manner which takes into account the public interest, instead of being automatically auctioned off to the highest bidders. Large institutions, corporate or governmental, should be ineligible for these licenses: 90% of the frequencies is enough for them!!

Finally, we urge the Commission to view establishment of a Low Power Radio Service as a major FIRST STEP toward restoring the free flow of ideas on the airwaves. Related issues -- such as tightened restrictions on media ownership and alternatives to auctioning of licenses for conventional radio stations -- require resolution in the near future.

## CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth herein, we respectfully urge the FCC to proceed with establishment of a Low Power Radio Service, incorporating the policy recommendations we have provided in these Reply Comments.

Respectfully submitted,

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