

# FCC moves threaten local news in Iowa and across the nation

Jessica Rosenworcel, Register Opinion contributor Published 4:55 p.m. CT Jan. 22, 2018



(Photo: Carolyn Kaster, AP)

Iowa has more than its fair share of proud — and truly local — traditions. From the butter cow at the state fair to the hospital wave at Hawkeye football games to the use of caucuses for decision-making, across the board Iowans do things differently. These differences make the state special and unique.

Local traditions are important. Washington policymakers should respect them — in Iowa and across the country. This is especially true when it comes to policies that help preserve and protect local media.

For decades, the Federal Communications Commission has had policies that support local media. The agency has long made localism — along with competition and diversity — the central values of its decisions involving how many radio and television broadcasting stations a single entity can own in a market. There's good reason for this — even in an age with lots of digital options, local broadcasting remains a dominant player in local news. It's where most people still turn to learn about what is happening in their town, their county and their state.

Regrettably, however, last year the FCC wiped out many of these rules, clearing the way for a single company to own half of the top television stations in a market along with multiple radio stations and the local newspaper. Even more worrisome, the agency is now fashioning new rules to override a law that says that no single company can own television stations that together reach more than 39 percent of the national audience. This is troubling.



Jessica Rosenworcel (Photo: Special to the Register)

That trouble is headed directly to Iowa and its local media markets. Right now, there is a merger waiting for approval in Washington that hits Iowa hard. Sinclair Broadcasting and Tribune Media are seeking approval to combine their television stations. If allowed, this combination would create a national broadcasting behemoth that would change the local character of broadcasting. It would mean a single company could reach 72 percent of the nation's households by owning an unprecedented 230 television stations.

Across the towns and cornfields of Iowa, Sinclair and Tribune combined would own or operate nearly a dozen television stations. Their service would reach 1.7 million households in Iowa every day. In Des Moines alone, they would own two of the top four television stations — dominating the news in the capital city. But outside of the capital city, they would have top stations in the markets in Davenport, Sioux City, Cedar Rapids, Ottumwa and others.

It's true that the media landscape is changing. Online services can bring news to our devices when it happens, wherever we are. But for authentic local coverage, local ownership and commitment matters. Allowing a broadcaster to become so big has real consequences for news, campaigns and communities across Iowa. Washington should not be clearing the way for big companies to overwhelm local media markets. Because local traditions — and local coverage — matter.

*Jessica Rosenworcel is a commissioner to the Federal Communications Commission.*

Read or Share this story: <http://dmreg.co/2DAyhBP>

