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much consolidation" ("Lott Says He's 'Disturbed About The FCC,'" 3/1). Similarly, Sen. John McCain has derided the law's resulting "megamergers."

Ironically, a 1996 FCC summary of the legislation's intent is ludicrous in retrospect. It states, "The goal of this new law is to let anyone enter any communications business." Clearly, the result has been the opposite, to the detriment of radio and its listeners.

As nascent technology 80 years ago, radio was described by the *New Republic* as being "under the control of men unfitted by training and personality for posts of such importance." Author and professor Susan J. Douglas interprets, "These were businessmen ignorant of radio's 'proper use' and 'indifferent as to whether it is used properly or not.'" Resonating today, those words aptly describe 21st-century media conglomerates that have been abetted by the Telecom Act and backed by an unfit member of a certain Washington, DC "think tank."

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Amid Consolidation, Radio's Public Interest Role Should Not Be Forgotten

Kudos to **R&R** Washington Bureau Assoc. Editor Joe Howard on a thought-provoking analysis of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 ("Telecom Act Turns 6," 2/15, 2/22). It was heartening to read comments attributed to New Northwest Broadcasters President Ivan Braiker, who is to be commended for his reminder to broadcasters that it is a *privilege* to hold a station license, even in this day of consolidation. Sadly, this important point seems lost on many.

Adam Thierer of the Cato Institute appears to be one such person. Despite his lofty job title in telecommunications, Mr. Thierer seemingly has no knowledge of the Communications Act of 1934, which grants broadcasters the *privilege to use,* not ownership over, the *publicly owned* airwaves and mandates that they serve the public interest, convenience and necessity. Toward that end, the legislation seeks to ensure, through ownership restrictions, that a broadcaster cannot attain undue concentration of control. I remind Mr. Thierer that, although updated by later legislation, the earlier law's public-interest requirement was *not* superseded by the Telecommunications Act of 1996 but, rather, remains in effect today.

Mr. Thierer would do well to familiarize himself with said proviso and, moreover, to avoid irrelevant comparisons between broadcasters and the manufacturers of automobiles and soda pop, which, he intimates, are not unique from one another. Well, Mr. Thierer, while purveyors of cars and sugar water use their own resources to make and peddle their wares (and, in doing so, are subject to myriad governmental regulations), broadcasters, in contrast, use a limited, *publicly owned* resource — the airwaves — to deliver their product. Should they not also be subject to governmental oversight?

To assert, as Mr. Thierer does, that broadcasting's public-interest mandate is "arbitrary and undefined" suggests a misunderstanding of the radio and television industries. Moreover, he doesn't do any favors for the broadcasting industry through his belief that radio is like any other business — a notion that, arguably, is at the root of many of radio's troubles today.

(Consistent with his views, should we expect Mr. Thierer and others who share his sentiments to rally in support of greater unionization of employees in radio? I suppose so, *if* it were true that radio is no different from Ford or General Motors. Better be careful, Mr. Thierer, for your faulty analogy may lead to the media behemoths getting something they didn't wish for.)

In analyzing the effects of the Telecom Act, better to heed the cautionary words of Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott, who laments, "There may have been too

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