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SCHAKOWSKY SPEAKS OUT TO PROTECT LOW POWER FM RADIO

CALLS LPFM "A GREAT HOPE' AGAINST MEDIA CONSOLIDATION

WASHINGTON, DC -- Joined by the Indigo Girls, Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-NY), and public interest advocates, Rep. Jan Schakowsky, ranking member on the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection, today spoke at a press conference in support of maintaining local control for low power FM radio. On May 2nd, Rep. Schakowsky sent a letter to FCC Chairman Martin to protect low power FM airwaves from being bought out by a few large corporations.
Rep. Schakowsky's full statement is below, as prepared for delivery:

"Thank you, everyone, for joining us to celebrate the astounding power of low power FM (LPFM).

I would like to extend a special thank you to the Indigo Girls, Amy Ray and Emily Saliers, for being with us and for using their voices to spread the word about LPFM. You have done a magnificent job. And, thank you, Congresswoman Slaughter, for organizing today's event.

Like Congresswoman Slaughter, I believe that LPFM can help ensure that local priorities and diverse voices get on the airwaves. Low power FM provides a great hope to prevent further media consolidation. It's critical that we protect LPFM from being bought out by a few big corporations.

When I discovered that three individuals started three "front companies" to misappropriate and sell the public spectrum for personal profit - and that this would mean fewer licenses for LPFM stations - I organized a letter to the Federal

Communications Commission asking for an investigation into this scandal and to explain to Congress just how it was possible for three people to get over 1,000 licenses.

I was disturbed that not only did these people make $800,000 by selling the public's spectrum, but that they sold it to people with only one point of view.

We may need to change the law to ensure that this does not happen again, and I look forward to working with Congresswoman Slaughter on the issue.

Low power FM is important because in this era of media consolidation, we are hearing fewer and fewer voices. If we share spectrum with community groups, local churches, and neighborhood schools through LPFM licenses, then we are taking a big step toward restoring what we are missing today.

In almost half of the largest markets, the three largest corporations control 80 percent of the radio audience.

This has made it harder for diverse opinions to be heard. In March of 2003, Clear Channel refused to air an advertisement in which Congressman Danny Davis and I expressed our opposition to waging war in Iraq. Clear Channel refused to put the advertisement on the air.

Part of the problem is that many entities that own media outlets are more focused on their bottom line rather than the public's right to hear and express diverse views.

I do not dispute the right to pursue profits. However, greater media ownership concentration will hurt our democracy.

LPFM is one of the ways we can restore the free and open media that is central to our

democracy. LPFM can fuel civic discussion, encourage public participation in policy debates, and ensure representation of ideological, cultural and geographic diversity. LPFM gives us a lot to celebrate.

Additionally, LPFM - and the fight against over-concentration of media ownership - will improve the quality of what makes it onto the airwaves.

There has been an obsession in Congress about getting "indecency" off the airwaves. I don't know what it was about Janet Jackson's nipple, but it set off a frenzy here.

Personally, I am much more concerned about protecting my grandchildren's First Amendment rights than I am about them seeing Janet Jackson's nipple.

I believe that if we set enormous fines against artists - as has been proposed - we will violate the Constitutional right to free speech with another form of censorship.

Broadcast content is getting worse - in so many ways - not because fines aren't high enough, but because of media ownership getting further away from local control.

Community standards and local voices are being lost because ownership of stations has moved from the hands of the people to the hands of the conglomerates. The concentration of media ownership into fewer and fewer hands takes effects both infringes on the rights of local communities' right to decide what they want to see and hear.

Again, I believe that for those who are concerned about indecency, a much better solution than fining artists would be promoting LPFM.

I also have another personal stake in LPFM. Most of you probably don't know this, but I am in a band myself with a few other members of Congress. And, I know that the only chance that we ever have of getting on air is if a LPFM station decided to play our music."