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Seminar zeroes in on 'big media'

Author: Morrell, Alan

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Abstract:

Mary Anna Towler, publisher of City newspaper, talked about how large newspaper chains - including Gannett Co. Inc., which publishes the Democrat and Chronicle - have added newspapers but cut back on what she called important news.

Full text:

Alan Morrell

Staff writer

Plenty of people during a seminar Monday night about media ownership had concerns about what is presented on TV and the radio and in their newspapers. Just as many had concerns about what is not presented.

Those were the topics presented during a seminar at St. John Fisher College on media ownership. A standing-room-only crowd turned out at the college's Kearney Auditorium for the seminar.

The topics included reality TV shows, sensationalism and triviality, and conglomerates.

Jonathan Adelstein, a commissioner of the Federal Communication Commission, said democracy requires diverse viewpoints. That is threatened, he said, when one company owns several outlets in one market.

"Once you allow the big companies to get bigger, you can't undo it," he said. "We need more voices in the media, but not just from one ventriloquist."

Mary Anna Towler, publisher of City newspaper, talked about how large newspaper chains - including Gannett Co. Inc., which publishes the Democrat and Chronicle - have added newspapers but cut back on what she called important news.

Thomas P. Flynn, Vice President/Communications for the Democrat and Chronicle, disagreed.

"In order to fully examine the issues, you need to hear from all points of view, and most of us were not included in the invitation to the forum," he said. "Covering the community is our No. 1 priority. We think we do it well and our readers mostly approve."

U.S. Rep. Louise Slaughter, D-Fairport, called for the seminar, saying she has for years been opposed to "big media." She and Adelstein discussed congressional acts in 2003 that further relaxed laws about how many media outlets a company can own. The public, Slaughter said, was outraged and flooded her office with letters and e-mails.

"We need to reverse the FCC rules for changes," she said. "Our best chance to turn this harmful trend around is to join forces."

Others on the panel were Norm Silverstein, CEO of WXXI Public Broadcasting Council; Richard C. Greene, owner and manager of WLVL-AM in Niagara County; and Damone Richardson of Cornell University.

Andy Dillon of Rochester said he was impressed with the seminar. Dillon helps produce local news about issues he said are not usually covered by the mainstream media.

"Discourse gets narrowed with media consolidation," he said. "I don't see much good that comes out of it."

AMORRELL@DemocratandChronicle.com

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