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U.S. Pushes Fight On TV-Paper Link

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intensifying efforts to have the Federal Communications Commission prohibit newspapers from owning local radio and television stations.

In a filing with the FCC yesterday, antitrust division attorneys urged the commission to phase out cross ownerships over a five-to eight-year period by denying license renewals.

About 100 joint newspaper-television ownerships would be affected. However, publishers would still be permitted to own out-of-town broadcast outlets.

Justice Department officials described yesterday's filing as a "reiteration" of a proposal the department first made in May, 1971.

The FCC has had new cross-ownership rules under consideration since 1970, but the proposals have been dormant until recently. Last March the commission revived the issue, and scheduled oral arguments for June 18. Yesterday was the deadline for written comments.

During recent months, the Justice Department has sought to prod the commission by opposing individual license renewals as they came due. Since last November, the department has asked the FCC to lift publishers' broadcast licenses in Milwaukee, St. Louis, Minneapolis, Des Moines, and most recently in Topeka, Kan.

Last January, when the department filed its first formal petition asking the FCC not to renew broadcast licenses held by publishers in St. Louis and Des Moines, allegations were made that the move was politically inspired by the White House. However, by The Washington Post found no evidence of political motivation.

In fact, an administration-sponsored bill, which has passed the House and is before the Senate Commerce Committee, would prohibit the FCC from using the license renewal process to break up cross ownerships. Clay Whitehead, head of the White House Office of Telecommunications Policy, says he favors considering objections to cross ownership on a case-by-case basis, according to the degree of concentration.

The Justice Department, in contrast, wants to ban cross-ownership outright. The brief filed yesterday cites both the need for diversity of editorial expression as well as more competition for local advertising.

"The perpetuation of existing commonly owned, co-located daily newspapers and television stations is inconsistent with the policies of the Communications Act and the antitrust laws," the brief declares.

Average prices of TV advertising are 15 per cent higher in communities with joint newspaper-broadcast ownership, according to the department, and newspaper ad rates are about 10 per cent higher.

The proposed ban on joint ownership is supported by several "public interest" media groups. The two major trade associations, the National Association of Broadcasters and the American Newspaper Publishers Association, oppose the plan.