

# PROMETHEUS RADIO PROJECT

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## McCain/Leahy Introduce Bill to Allow Thousands of New Community Radio Stations

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On June 4th, Congress members introduced legislation that could allow the licensing and construction of thousands of Low Power FM (LPFM) radio stations in America's cities. Commerce Committee Chairman John McCain introduced the legislation, and Senator Leahy co-sponsored it. The bill is designed to remove barriers from the FM broadcast spectrum that have previously prevented community groups from building LPFM stations, especially in cities.

The Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Michael Powell, has also expressed support for an expanded LPFM service. If this legislation is made into law, the FCC will most likely license thousands of new LPFMs. On the Senate Floor, Senator McCain said that broadcasters had made "grossly exaggerated claims of interference" and asked broadcasters to join him in supporting community radio. He also referenced the \$2.2 million dollars of taxpayers' money that was spent on the major study conducted to review these claims of interference.

The Low Power FM (LPFM) radio service was adopted by the Federal Communications Commission in January of 2000. LPFM was made available to high schools, labor unions, churches, towns, and community groups of all kinds. The stations are designed to be licensed to non-profit groups, and must be completely non-commercial. About 300 of these stations, broadcasting at 100 watts or less, are on the air now.

"Community radio has been choked back by incumbents for long enough. Clear Channel and the rest of the commercial broadcasters can't hide behind engineering arguments anymore. The NAB can't tell us that there is room on the dial for eight of their stations on the dial, and no place for community radio." said Pete Tridish, Technical Director at the Prometheus Radio Project.

The proposal to create a Low Power FM radio service received support from many thousands of potential broadcasters and organizations. The only significant opposition came from powerful and large incumbent broadcasters, who claimed that LPFM would interfere with their signals. In late 2000, because of pressure from existing broadcasters, Congress enacted the "Radio Broadcasting Preservation Act". This legislation forced the FCC to adopt exorbitant protection standards, buffers of empty spectrum, around existing radio stations. As the result of this act, about 75% of opportunities for new LPFM stations were eliminated. Urban areas were particularly affected, with the Preservation Act leaving only one new low power station available in the largest fifty American cities. The current legislation will simply reverse the 2000 action by Congress.

However, at the time, Congress also required the FCC to commission independent field tests to resolve the issue of LPFM's potential for interference. After three years of waiting, this study, administered by The MITRE Corporation, was released. The study demonstrates that LPFM stations cause no significant interference to existing stations, and recommends that the third channel adjacency restriction be lifted.

"Low Power FM Radio is one real solution to the overly-consolidated airwaves," said Prometheus volunteer Jaclyn Ford. "We hope that Congress will act quickly to give America these essential tools for community-building and free speech."

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