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Nexstar Broadcasting Group Inc. has reached a retransmission agreement with Cox Communications that will resolve a television blackout that started late last week.

The agreement covers 13 stations in nine markets. Nexstar said specific terms weren't disclosed. Contract disputes between programmers and distributors have become commonplace in recent years. A major cause of the conflicts is that programmers want higher fees from distributors for carriage of their channels.

TV viewers around the country endured a record 193 blackouts in 2015, up from 94 the previous year and eight in 2010, because of an intensifying battle between cable companies and the broadcasters who provide a key part of their programming. Last month, Dish Network LLC accused Minnesota-based media conglomerate Cordillera Communications LLC of pulling its broadcast signals during NFL wild-card playoff games in multiple markets to use the games as leverage. The two sides settled the dispute. Last month, Nexstar reached a deal to buy Media General Inc. for \$2.13 billion, ending a three-way merger standoff with rival deal-seeker Meredith Corp. — *Wall Street Journal*

Charter Communications Inc. CEO Tom Rutledge told analysts on Thursday that the cable company could hire 20,000 for new service-related jobs if it merges with Time Warner Cable Inc. and Bright House Networks to slash the outsourcing of service calls to overseas centers and hire more in-house techs. It seems like good customer service vows have broken out like a rash all over the cable industry.

Rutledge, a long-time cable executive, has boosted employment at Charter by about 43 percent over the last several years as he has transformed the former bankrupt cablecaster into a smooth operator that has proposed acquiring Time Warner Cable and Bright House. Federal regulators are expected to make a decision on the Charter/Time Warner Cable/Bright House deal within months. The regulators opposed a similar deal when Comcast Corp. proposed it.

At Charter, Rutledge has curtailed outsourcing of customer service operations and says he would do the same with newly acquired companies. Using his model, Rutledge

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estimates that he would need the additional 20,000 employees. Charter has not said how long it would take to hire them. On Thursday, Charter said it added 29,000 TV subscribers in the fourth quarter. Comcast, the nation's largest cable company that is revamping its customer service with thousands of new employees and hundreds of millions of dollars, said on Wednesday that the Philadelphia company added 89,000 TV customers in the period, its best performance since late 2006. – ***Philadelphia Inquirer***

Phil Connors, the grumpy, fictional weatherman in the movie “Groundhog Day,” often referred to the **groundhog in Punxsutawney** with whom he shared a name as a rodent.

That characterization has another (real) Pennsylvanian upset. **State Rep. Peter Daley**, (D-Washington) has lambasted Weather Channel meteorologist Stephanie Abrams for her “sarcastic, repeated use of the word rodent in reference to Punxsutawney Phil,” the prognosticating groundhog who did not see his shadow and thusly forecast an early spring, during Tuesday’s broadcast. “How dare she belittle a time-honored tradition in Pennsylvania,” Daley said when reached by phone and asked if he was serious about a letter he sent to Abrams asking for an apology.

“It was in her 7 a.m. live coverage, and it was disgusting. She took a negative tone on something that’s very festive, saying, ‘Oh he’s just a rodent, what does he know?’ It was kind of beneath her to do that; to editorialize and put a negative spin from a national outlet on something that is very positive,” Daley said. Daley was so serious that accompanying a press release was a copy of the letter he sent to Abrams.

“Your negativity was appalling and demonstrated your ignorance toward this popular American tradition, the people of Pennsylvania, and the loyal viewers of the Weather Channel. With that said, I am requesting you publicly apologize for your remarks,” said an excerpt of the letter. “Of course she can’t apologize to Phil,” Daley said in a telephone interview, “but she should surely apologize to the borough of Punxsutawney.”

Daley was particularly upset with Abrams’ usage of the phrase, “you know, it’s just a rodent.” “Phil is ‘just a rodent’ as much as the Grand Canyon is just a ditch, the pierogi just a snack and the Pittsburgh Steelers just another football team,” he said in the news release, and took a dig at Abrams’ alma mater, the University of Florida, whose mascot is an alligator. “You don’t diss Phil without risking payback about the societal value of Florida alligators, whose claim to fame seemingly is making poodles disappear,” Daley said.

An emailed statement from The Weather Channel on Abrams’ behalf said she and the network “have nothing but respect for Punxsutawney Phil and all rodents including Mickey Mouse, Speedy Gonzales and Stuart Little. We encourage anyone and everyone – no matter their level of fur – to learn more about the world around them and explore weather sciences.” For the record, a groundhog, also known a woodchuck, or whistlepig, is technically classified as a rodent of the animal family Sciuridae, which is the same family that includes ground squirrels, and all are also known as marmots, according to the Smithsonian Institution. – ***Washington (PA) Observer-Reporter***



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