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Scripps Networks Interactive Inc. said it acquired the remaining 35% interest in Travel Channel Media that it didn't already own from Cox Communications Inc. for \$99 million.

Scripps Chief Executive Kenneth W. Lowe said the Travel Channel is one of the cable content provider's key assets and that full ownership will allow Scripps to "take maximum advantage of its continued growth." The Knoxville, Tenn., company said it secured a controlling interest in Travel Channel Media from Cox in 2009. Under that deal, Scripps said that it contributed \$181 million to its partnership with Cox, and guaranteed \$878 million in third-party debt. Scripps said its also sold its 7.25% ownership interest in Fox-BRV Southern Sports Holdings LLC, comprising the Sports South and Fox Sports Net South regional television networks, to Fox Southern Holdings Inc., for \$225 million in cash.

On Tuesday, Scripps logged better-than-expected fourth-quarter results, thanks to higher domestic advertising revenue and moves to increase its international presence. The company, like many others across the cable industry, has faced increasing pressure as consumers shift from traditional cable to streaming options such as Netflix. But Scripps, whose portfolio includes HGTV and Food Network, has beefed up its international presence by taking HGTV to Asia and Food Network to Brazil, Belgium and the Czech Republic as well as buying Polish TV operator TVN. – *Wall Street Journal*

Local PBS stations could pull in hundreds of millions of dollars this year by selling their airwaves to the federal government, raising worries that pockets of the U.S. could lose their access to "Downton Abbey," "Sesame Street" and other free PBS broadcasts.

The Federal Communications Commission is poised to buy broadcast licenses from local TV stations, aiming to free up airwaves and resell them to wireless providers like AT&T Inc. and Verizon Communications Inc., which are working to keep up with booming demand for bandwidth. Major station owners, including CBS Corp., have agreed to participate in the FCC auction. So have some of the nation's roughly 350 public-TV stations, whose broadcasts currently cover about 99% of the U.S. population. It isn't clear just how many stations have signed on, because the process is confidential under FCC rules.

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The stations that sell their airwaves could go off the air, potentially redrawing the map for public television and its audience. The Public Broadcasting Service, which produces programming for its independent member stations, has little say in the matter, and won't get any of the sales proceeds. Public-TV advocates fear the auction will deprive some Americans of their free access to noncommercial television. "We've been concerned about that for quite a while, and still don't have a good handle on what our exposure is there," said Patrick Butler, president of the Association of Public Television Stations, referring to the possibility that some stations could leave the air.

PBS estimates that about 20% of its prime-time viewers watch over-the-air broadcasts, with the bulk watching on pay television. Its supporters are especially worried about access to commercial-free children's programming, including such popular educational shows as "Sesame Street" and "Super Why!" PBS says children 2 to 8 years old watch it three times as much as they watch other broadcast channels.

A spokesman for the FCC said the agency believes only a small number of communities, if any, would be left without over-the-air public broadcasting. He said the FCC will address any service losses in any such communities on a case-by-case basis, and could designate a new channel for noncommercial use in those markets.

Almost 2,000 broadcasters nationwide were eligible to apply to participate in the FCC's auction, but the FCC isn't disclosing how many did so. As part of the auction process, which kicks off at the end of March, the FCC will progressively lower its opening bids, seeking to secure as much spectrum as it wants at the lowest possible cost. Along the way, some stations are expected to drop out, and prices are likely to fall well below the opening bids.

But for public broadcasters, even the reduced payouts could be significant. The PBS station in San Bernardino, Calif. drew an opening bid of \$628 million, which would cover its annual budget for nearly 90 years. The station, KVCR, owned by the San Bernardino Community College District, said its options include going off the air, but it declined to comment on its plans, citing FCC rules.

For PBS stations, a decision to sell wouldn't be without risk. Any that cease broadcasting would no longer qualify for PBS membership. Those that choose to continue could accept a lower bid in exchange for the FCC assigning them to a new, less-powerful frequency, or could arrange to share a frequency with another

channel. Still, an auction jackpot could complicate their fund-raising efforts by making it tougher to get donors to stay active, or giving Congress cover to cut off funding for public television.

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which gets about \$450 million a year from the federal government and doled out about \$224 million to PBS stations in fiscal 2015, says a windfall from the FCC would “have a negative effect on federal and state funding.” The CPB also said it would threaten the “continued support of members, donors and underwriters,” which supply the bulk of funding these stations.

Getting donors to keep writing checks could be tricky. Adrian Sargeant, professor of fundraising at Britain’s Plymouth University, says that establishing a clear need for funds is a key component of getting people to give. “Even big organizations like Harvard would still say they have a need,” he said. “The need is on a different level but it is still there.”

A third of the nation’s public broadcasting licenses are owned by universities, which could use proceeds from the auction elsewhere in their budgets. Howard University, in Washington, put its station, WHUT in the auction. The station drew an opening bid of \$460 million. Howard University said it is keeping its options open, including taking the station off the air. The station said it wouldn’t provide any updates on its status until the FCC announces its auction results. Bowling Green University said it will try to sell the spectrum held by its PBS member station without going off the air.

Michigan State University took a firm stance in declaring that it wouldn’t sell, following public opposition to the possibility of its station leaving the air. The university said it now views public broadcasting’s “role at the university, and for the state, in a new way.” FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler said last month that “it is safe to say that you are going to see a spectrum extravaganza.” – **Wall Street Journal**

After passing the Senate earlier this month, the President has formally signed a permanent ban on Internet access taxes. The Permanent Internet Tax Freedom Act replaces the original Tax Freedom Act, which was passed in 1998 but required periodic renewal -- five times since the law was originally enacted. Past moratoriums have allowed the roughly ten states that had specific broadband access taxes (not to be confused with all the other taxes and fees on your bill) before 1998 to retain them, though this new Act prevents those taxes as well. – **DSL Reports**

Attorney General Kathleen Kane says she's hoping for a 5 percent budget increase for her office after she appeared before a panel of state senators, including many who had sought unsuccessfully to remove her from office. Questions focused on law enforcement matters during Kane's approximately hour-long Senate Appropriations Committee hearing Thursday. Neither Kane nor senators mentioned the failed vote two weeks ago to oust her.

Kane says the hearing didn't feel any differently than last year's Appropriations Committee hearing. Kane urged lawmakers to equip her office with the money to hire more agents and analysts, and to approve more money for drug treatment centers. Kane is fighting criminal charges that she illegally gave secret investigative information to a newspaper and lied about it under oath. She also had her law license suspended by the state Supreme Court. – **Associated Press**

Zooks! D'Oh! Sufferin Succotash!

Either one of those cartoon catch phrases can sum up voters' increasingly disparate view of state government and its politicians. Two out of three registered voters — 67 percent — now believe the state is “on the wrong track,” according to a **Franklin &**

Marshall College Poll released to all media on Thursday. That is 5 percentage points higher than the last poll, conducted in October.

Nearly half of those surveyed say that government and politicians are the state's biggest problems because of the nearly 8-month-long budget impasse. That's a 9 percentage point increase from October (38 percent to 47 percent). As a result, the number of voters who think Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf is doing an "excellent" or "good job" has dropped 5 percentage points to 31 percent. The drop among Democrats plunged 12 percentage points to 45 percent. The poll did not ask voters for their views of the Legislature or individual lawmakers.

But it did ask about Democratic Attorney General Kathleen Kane, who had her law licenses suspended for perjury charges, survived a Senate vote to remove her and is facing the start of an impeachment inquiry in the House. Out of 562 voters surveyed on Kane, 58 percent said she should resign and face impeachment in the House. The resignation answer was an increase of 7 percentage points from October. The impeachment answer was an increase of 1 percentage point. A total of 985 registered voters participated in the survey between Feb. 13-21. It had a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points. – *Allentown Morning Call*

Have you heard? **State Rep. Vanessa Lowery Brown** is running for reelection. That's not particularly newsworthy - except that Brown currently faces corruption charges for allegedly pocketing \$5,000 in cash from a lobbyist-turned-informant. "I believe that when you have an incumbent, I believe that our community likes to support its own and she is innocent as long as she hasn't been convicted of a crime and I believe the community is going to support her." Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell said at a recent event she attended with Brown, the Philadelphia Tribune reported. Perhaps Brown just forgot to report the \$5,000 on her financial-disclosure forms? Hey, it's possible. Right? – *Philadelphia Daily News*



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