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Cable operator Mediacom Communications wants the FCC to change its rules to condition a television station's license renewal on the station's agreeing to not terminate an MVPD's carriage of the station's signal upon the expiration of a retransmission consent agreement if the station is not accessible via over-the-air reception or Internet streaming to at least 90% percent of the homes in its local market served by the MVPD.

In a petition for rulemaking filed at the FCC today, Mediacom says that while "broadcast lobbyists contend that free over-the-air television service is universally available, many broadcast stations do not transmit a viewable signal to significant portions of their local markets and, for the past few decades, the broadcast industry has done exceedingly little to expand the free availability of local television stations to in-market viewers.



"Moreover, the unfortunate reality is that broadcasters currently have no incentive to increase the number of viewers receiving free local television service. "As a result, the broadcast industry's commitment to free over-the-air service is dying, and television viewers all over the country have become subject to

retransmission consent-fueled increases in the price of pay TV service or service disruptions that result from retransmission consent impasses.

These price increases and service disruptions hit hardest those viewers retransmission consent was supposed to protect — those that cannot receive local broadcast signals without MVPD service. "The public interest would be well-served by the adoption of rules that create incentives for local broadcasters to extend free access to their signals." The petition also says that in order to "minimize the risk that the proposed rule will encourage retransmission consent negotiating impasses, it would not apply if the MVPD has terminated active negotiations with the broadcaster, as defined by the commission."

In a separate letter to FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler, Mediacom CEO Rocco Comisso decried what he called broadcasters' plan to continue to use station blackouts as the primary tool for forcing retransmission consent fees from today's \$6 billion per year level to upwards of \$29 billion annually. He expressed his disappointment with the chairman's policy of not meeting with parties to an ongoing retransmission consent dispute, "the very time when consumers most need your help."

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The petition added: "Simply put, viewers residing in a station's local market do not benefit from locally-oriented broadcast programming when they cannot view it because they have no free access to the station's signal and either cannot afford to receive the station via a pay TV service or are blocked from receiving it from their chosen pay TV service due to a retransmission consent shutdown. Even though it may be possible for viewers suffering due to a blackout during a negotiating impasse to switch providers, it is neither cheap nor easy to do so."

And, Mediacom added, "Even viewers who have free access to broadcast service but nonetheless receive broadcast signals as part of their MVPD service will benefit from the moderating effect that the proposed rule will have on out-of-control retransmission consent fee increases and on the use of shutdowns to force MVPDs (and their customers) to accept such increases."

The full text of Commisso's letter to Wheeler and Mediacom's petition for rulemaking can be found [here](#). – **TV NewsCheck**

A forthcoming TV ad from a national Democratic group that supports Gov. Tom Wolf will expand the air war over his week-old budget standoff with Republicans who control the Pennsylvania Legislature. The Democratic Governors Association says the 30-second statewide TV ad by an affiliate group starts Wednesday. It will criticize Republicans over the budget bill Wolf vetoed, saying the Republicans' plan let the oil and gas industry off the hook, didn't adequately fund education and deepened the deficit.

The group says it's spending over \$500,000 to run the ad for 10 days. Senate Majority Leader Jake Corman says Republicans don't support Wolf's pursuit of a tax increase on income or sales. Corman isn't ruling out other kinds of tax increases, such as on gas drilling, to help Wolf meet his goals, within reason. – **Associated Press**

Pennsylvania's former governor, Ed Rendell, says national Democrats have contacted Gov. Tom Wolf's top aide about running for U.S. Senate. However, Rendell said Tuesday he doesn't think Katie McGinty will run and that she's committed to working through a budget standoff with state lawmakers as Wolf's chief of staff. McGinty served six years as Rendell's environmental protection secretary.

Rendell says he expects the Washington, D.C.-based Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee will support Joe Sestak for the party's nomination if McGinty decides not to run. A committee spokeswoman declined comment and McGinty is only saying that she's focused on working for Wolf right now. Allentown Mayor Ed Pawlowski has suspended his campaign. That leaves Sestak a clear path to the nomination to challenge incumbent Republican Sen. Pat Toomey in the 2016 election. – **Associated Press**



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