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A group of state attorneys general is examining whether AT&T Inc.'s proposed takeover of satellite-television provider DirecTV violates antitrust laws, the Florida Attorney General's Office said. State attorneys general were already working with the U.S. Justice Department's antitrust division in a review of Comcast Corp.'s purchase of Time Warner

Cable Inc. Those states included Florida, Connecticut, Maryland and Ohio.

The states' investigation expands regulatory scrutiny of AT&T's \$48.5 billion deal for DirecTV, which would combine the nation's largest satellite-TV company with AT&T's existing packages of wireless, phone and high-speed Internet service. The states' examination is in addition to reviews by the Justice Department and the Federal Communications Commission.

Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi is part of a group of states reviewing the AT&T-DirecTV merger, according to her office. New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman is also part of the group, said a person familiar with the matter who wasn't authorized to speak publicly about the investigation. "We look forward to discussions with these state attorneys general on the significant consumer benefits created by this merger," said Michael Balmoris, a spokesman for Dallas-based AT&T. Darris Gringeri, a spokesman for El Segundo, California-based DirecTV, declined to comment on the probe. The states' review was reported earlier by Reuters. – **Bloomberg**

A U.S. senator has called into question how the Federal Communications Commission is reviewing the proposed acquisitions of pay-television companies Time Warner Cable by Comcast Corp.

In a Wednesday letter to FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler, Sen. Dean Heller (R., Nev.) requested information regarding any confidential meetings the agency has had with media companies as part of its regulatory review of the deals. Sen. Heller is a member of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation. The letter, in response to a recent article in *The Wall Street Journal*

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disclosing that the FCC was offering the cloak of anonymity to companies concerned about Comcast and AT&T, asked the agency to justify the reasons for the meetings.

While people or companies can express concerns about the two deals by filing public comments at the FCC, an agency spokeswoman has said offering confidentiality to concerned parties is "an established part of the FCC's rules." Such confidentiality is typically granted if a company fears that going public could lead to reprisals or retribution. Typically, companies that meet with FCC officials disclose such meetings in ex-parte filings.

Sen. Heller said "the bar for such exemptions must be set high." He added that decisions by the FCC that "have significant impact on the industry are crafted based on information provided in secret and go unchallenged, I believe it can undermine the effectiveness of the order." Many television programmers are worried that the two deals will give Comcast and AT&T tremendous leverage when it comes to negotiating contracts. A combined Comcast-Time Warner Cable will reach around 30 million homes while DirecTV and AT&T will have over 25 million subscribers.

Discovery Communications has been one of the few major programmers to go public about their worries. At a Goldman Sachs investor conference Wednesday, Discovery Chief Executive David Zaslav said the Comcast-Time Warner Cable deal "presents some serious issues." An FCC spokeswoman declined to comment on Sen. Heller's letter. –

Reuters

A labor dispute at Cablevision escalated Thursday after the cable TV operator claimed its Brooklyn technicians voted to tune out their union — the Communication Workers of America.

Cablevision said it hired an outside firm to anonymously poll its 264 workers in the tech unit on whether they wanted to continue being represented by CWA Local 1109. The firm said 93 percent of the workers responded to the non-binding survey. The results found that a slight majority of respondents voted — 129 to 115 — to sever ties with CWA. "It is time for the CWA to respect our employees' wishes and withdraw," Cablevision said in a statement. CWA officials dismissed the company-sponsored poll as a "sham vote" and propaganda. "The conduct of this election would make Vladimir Putin blush," said CWA District One VP Chris Shelton.

The union said in the only legal vote that matters, Cablevision workers voted three years ago to join CWA in an election monitored by the federal government. Cablevision said it asked the National Labor Relations Board to schedule another binding vote. For his part, Mayor de Blasio is siding with CWA — one of the first unions to endorse him for City Hall — in the dispute.

In an extraordinary use of his office, de Blasio in July directly interceded by appearing at a private CWA meeting held in a Brooklyn public school building. He told the workers, "I am with you every step of the way." Nearly 14,000 other Cablevision workers are not represented by CWA. Cablevision on Thursday accused de Blasio of "advocating the union's agenda against the wishes of our employees." – **New York Post**; also, **Cablevision CEO Jim Dolan's band opens for the Eagles at Madison Square Garden**

Scripps isn't feeling the urge to merge.

Scripps Networks Interactive CEO Ken Lowe is bullish about the company's stand-alone prospects and said there are no talks to partner. There was talk of getting together with Discovery Communications but that went nowhere. Now the company is exploring joint ventures overseas to boost its stable of lifestyle cable networks. "It's more about quality than quantity," Lowe said when asked if Scripps has enough scale on its own.

Lowe, who appeared at the Goldman Sachs Communacopia conference on Thursday,

talked up the company's plans to grow Food Network and HGTV and boost Travel Channel's profile. Carriage deals for Travel are coming up for renewal this year, while the flagship channels' agreements are set to expire in 2015 and 2016. Lori Hickok, executive vice president of finance, said the firm agreed to a streaming deal with Amazon's Prime video service because the online retailer agreed to share viewing data. However, the two have not yet agreed to renew their SVOD licensing pact. Lowe declined to say if Scripps is talking to Sony and Dish about streaming deals for their new Internet-based TV services, although she suggested the company is talking broadly to a number of players. – ***New York Post***



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