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VNJ Notifies FCC of Ongoing Misrepresentations by Fox Television Stations

Fox Response to Ongoing FCC Investigation Grossly Overstates Staffing Levels at Fox-Owned WWOR-TV

In a filing today with the Federal Communications Commission, media advocacy group Voice for New Jersey (VNJ) documented ongoing misrepresentations and lack of candor by Fox Television Stations, Inc. (Fox) in the station owner's recent submissions to the FCC. The group leveled similar charges against Fox last year, which led the FCC to begin an investigation "concerning the accuracy, completeness, and truthfulness of representations made by Fox Television Stations, Inc." according to a letter from William Lake, Chief of the FCC's Media Bureau.

Announced in February, 2011, the FCC's investigation concerns Fox's filings related to the renewal of the broadcast license for WWOR-TV, Secaucus, NJ.

In April, Fox submitted its response to the FCC investigation. With this filing, Fox claimed that WWOR-TV employs 173 people at its Secaucus, NJ headquarters. VNJ claims that the station employs only 69 people in New Jersey, and that Fox misrepresented other aspects of the station's operations and wrongly withheld documents requested by the FCC.

"Since its 2007 application for the renewal of WWOR-TV's broadcast license, Fox has twice cut the station's already-deficient news and public affairs programming, and has repeatedly reduced the station's staffing and operating budget" says Donna Sandorse, a spokesperson for Voice for New Jersey (VNJ). "It has openly misrepresented its actions to the FCC, and has displayed an ongoing-- and truly appalling-- lack of candor even in the face of the Commission's investigation. Fox carefully parses information and language, discloses only information that it deems favorable to its interests, and buries or obscures the rest" says Sandorse.

Background

Today's filing by VNJ is but the latest skirmish in an ongoing battle over the renewal of WWOR-TV's station license.

In May, 2007 VNJ filed a petition to deny the license renewal. This filing was largely based on the failure of WWOR-TV to provide adequate levels of state and local news coverage and public affairs programming.

The petition gave rise to a rare public hearing by the FCC to help evaluate the station's licensing application. Several hundred people attended the November, 2007 hearing, held on the Rutgers Newark campus. Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) spoke at the hearing in support of the VNJ petition.

At this hearing, New Jersey residents complained of WWOR-TV's failure to provide adequate coverage of New Jersey issues. Many claimed that the station turned its back on its community of license, instead pursuing New York-oriented branding, marketing, and programming strategies. One month after the Newark hearing, at a Congressional hearing in Washington, DC, three of the FCC's five commissioners publicly expressed concerns with respect to the renewal of the WWOR station license. Then-FCC Chairman Kevin Martin indicated that any renewal of the license would likely be for less than the typical eight-year term, and would be subject to sanctions and reporting requirements to insure that the station fulfilled its public interest obligations.

Almost four years have passed since these comments were made, and the FCC has still not acted. Of the five FCC Commissioners seated at the time of these hearings, only one remains in office. Nonetheless it is expected that the FCC will finally address the WWOR licensing issue in the coming months-- a situation that remains a concern for Voice for New Jersey.

When the VNJ petition was filed, WWOR-TV aired a one-hour news broadcast seven days per week, and two half-hour public affairs programs on Sunday. This was already far below the programming offered by competing stations. In July, 2009, however, the station eliminated all weekend news broadcasts, reduced weekday news broadcasts to 35 minutes, and cut its public affairs programming in half. The station also slashed staffing at its Secaucus, NJ headquarters.

In a filing with the Commission in August of that year, however, Fox misrepresented these issues, and claimed that the prior levels of staffing and programming were still in place. Subsequent filings revealed efforts by Fox to conceal, rather than correct these misstatements. When VNJ brought these issues to light, the FCC launched its February, 2011 investigation.

Electronic copies of today's filing, along with past filings including Voice for New Jersey's Petition to Deny are available on the organization's website, , www.voicenj.com.

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About VNJ

Voice for New Jersey is an affiliation of individuals and organizations working together to increase media attention on New Jersey and improve the quality of the broadcast coverage that the State receives. Additional information can be found at the organization's website, www.voicenj.com.

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