

OPINION

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Comcast-NBC Merger: A Bad Deal

Cost to the public too high

BY CORIE WRIGHT

When you watch the news or read the paper, it's not hard to find evidence of the negative impact of media consolidation.

As media companies get bigger, local news and in-depth reporting take a backseat to sensationalism and celebrity gossip.

Now there's a new media merger on the horizon. And it's a real doozy.

A few months ago, cable giant Comcast announced it would buy NBC. Comcast has agreed to pay billions of dollars to acquire the venerable broadcaster—but the cost to the public will be far greater.

If Comcast, the nation's largest cable and Internet access provider, takes over NBC, it would be the largest media merger in a generation.

The combined company would include the NBC broadcast network (which supplies programming to NBC-affiliated stations all over the country), 10 NBC owned-and-operated TV stations, the Telemundo broadcast network, 16 owned-and-operated Spanish language TV stations, Internet properties, exclusive rights to the Olympic games, regional sports networks, television and movie studios as well as an ownership stake in a slew of cable channels, including MSNBC, the USA Network, and E!

In short, Comcast and NBC would control a sizeable chunk of the content you watch, as well as access to the platforms you use to watch it—namely, broadcast TV, cable TV, and the Internet.



Indeed, market analysts have estimated that a combined Comcast/NBC would control one in every five hours of television viewing.

The proposed merger also threatens competition and innovation as new forms of online video delivery, like Hulu.com, are emerging and gaining audiences. If the merger is approved, Comcast could prioritize its own online content and stifle the free flow of Internet traffic, giving you less choice in what you watch and how you watch it online.

If this seems like a raw deal for consumers, you're right. But that hasn't stopped Comcast from shelling out millions to convince Washington otherwise. Comcast spent \$12.6 million on 100 lobbyists in 2009, and another

\$3.1 million in the first quarter of 2010. Most of this has gone toward hiring Beltway insiders, including 78 former government officials, to join its lobbying arm.

That may sound pricey, but

If you're a Comcast customer, you probably think that money would be better spent improving your service or lowering your bills rather than helping Comcast get even bigger.

Comcast can well afford it. In 2009, Comcast's operating income was \$7.2 billion, up 7 percent from the year before. Plus, spending \$15 million on 100 lobbyists is chump change when you consider what Comcast pays its top brass. Last year, CNN Money

ranked Comcast as one of the five "Highest Paid Worst Performers" in America. Roberts' 2008 compensation: \$40.8 million.

If you're a Comcast customer, you probably think that money would be better spent improving

your service or lowering your bills rather than helping Comcast get even bigger. Comcast consistently ranks among the worst companies in customer service, and the Consumerist recently named it the "Worst Company in America."

Even so, Comcast's customers have already endured price hikes of nearly 50 percent in some areas. Clearly, the company isn't above padding its bottom line by raising your cable rates.

That's the bad news. Here's the good news: The government gets to review the proposed merger. The Department of Justice and the Federal Communications Commission are supposed to carefully review the transaction and consider what's best for us—the public.

Please tell them what you think. The FCC is taking public comments until June 21. Visit freepress.net/comcastaction before it's too late and tell the FCC why it should reject this bad deal for the American people.

Corie Wright is policy counsel for Free Press.



Letter to the Editor

The news over the Memorial Day weekend that crimes were committed against Oregonians simply because they are gay is a stark reminder that we must do more to battle hate crimes in Oregon.

That some of these crimes went unreported is unfortunate. That is why I applaud Attorney General John Kroger's announcement of a new online hate crime reporting form.

Victims often have legitimate

fears about going public by reporting hate crimes. An anonymous, online reporting system has the potential to encourage victims to seek justice.

I also support Kroger's plan to compile a five-year list of

Battling Hate Crimes

hate crimes in Oregon.

In this day and age, in the great state of Oregon, it is simply no longer an option to ignore the real threats the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community faces

on a regular basis. We must protect the civil rights of all Oregonians, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.

State Rep. Tina Kotek
North Portland