



Media Minutes
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Producers: Stevie Converse and Candace Clement

TRANSCRIPT

Comcast-NBC Merger Will Cut Jobs and Cut Out Independents, Congress Told

Comcast and NBC executives were back in Congress last week to testify at a House Judiciary Committee hearing. Comcast CEO Brian Roberts and NBC's Jeff Zucker claimed that the proposed merger of the two companies would strengthen the industry and would not lead to layoffs. But Larry Cohen, president of the Communications Workers of America wasn't impressed.

Larry Cohen: *The bottom line? The public must be protected from the significant harms created by a combination of such unprecedented scale. The Comcast-NBC combination will in fact lead to the loss of good jobs. In any of these restructurings, there's never a warranty on employment – only promises.*

Cohen says that to pay for the debt incurred in this deal, the merged company will have two choices: cut jobs or raise cable prices. He worries the deal will also harm workers who keep their jobs.

Larry Cohen: *Unfortunately, Comcast has a terrible track record of aggressive action to eliminate collective bargaining at the companies that it acquires.*

Jean Prewitt, the president of the Independent Film & Television Alliance, also took issue with the merger. She called independent producers the “workhorses” of the industry who are responsible for 70 percent of feature films and 63 percent of Oscar winners.

Jean Prewitt: *The issue before us today is whether America will continue to be informed, entertained and challenged by varied voices. The answer matters. Independent TV series and films have changed how Americans think, how we live and how we structure our society.*

Prewitt cited films like "The Hurt Locker" and "Precious," and TV shows like the "Cosby Show" that challenge audiences. A Comcast-NBC merger would continue the 15-year trend of consolidation that is squeezing independent producers out of the industry.

Jean Prewitt: *Comcast is buying NBC so that it can own more TV shows and more feature films. But this will come from the capacity to leverage their own programming across many platforms – from free TV to cable to video-on-demand to the Internet. They avoid the transaction costs, they say, of having to deal with third parties or independents in acquiring their programming.*

The public shouldn't be denied access to new messages and new messengers, says Prewitt.

Jean Prewitt: *A handful of executives now decide how, when and whether programs will reach the public. They're closing the door on diversity, and we must do whatever we can to pry that door open today. Make no mistake. What's good for Comcast and NBC in this merger isn't good for the American public.*

Fair Use Lecture Silenced By Automated Copyright System

Stanford law professor and intellectual property scholar, Lawrence Lessig, gives frequent lectures on fair use and the free culture movement – which seeks to overhaul copyright law to increase creativity and innovation.

Last week, Lessig gave a video lecture that was viewed by people across the globe who gathered to participate in the discussion on “remix culture.” As if to punctuate the very problems that concern Lessig about copyright, YouTube removed the audio from the lecture because of an alleged “copyright infringement” by Warner Music Group. YouTube's automated tool, “Content ID,” searches for copyrighted content and removes it.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation has pointed out on their blog that while “reasonable minds can differ about whether a particular use of a song qualifies as a fair use ... that's no excuse for the automated Content ID filter to block them.”

EFF and others have strongly criticized YouTube's computerized copyright screening system for removing humans from the takedown process. Fair use requires an assessment based on context that is not possible to automate.

This is not the first time that a Lessig lecture on copyright has been unceremoniously removed. Last year's lecture was taken down, too.

Try Googling Topeka, KS

In a publicity stunt effort to attract investment in a super-fast fiber network by the search engine giant, the city of Topeka, Kansas has temporarily renamed itself “Google.”

Topeka, er, Google, is hoping the move will entice the other Google to pick the city as one of the sites for the gigabit-per-second experimental networks the company has promised to roll out and test to some 500,000 users across the country.

While the name change will only last for one month, the move sparked the mayor of Duluth, Minn., to endorse a video parody proclaiming that all first born males and females in the city will be renamed “Google Fiber” and “Googlette Fiber.”

While the pandering and parodies have attracted significant press, the hunger for faster speeds and more connections is real. Topeka Mayor Bill Bunten told reporters he believes that kind of investment in infrastructure could keep young people in the community and attract business.

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