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Fox Station Challenged on Renewal of License

By ELIZABETH DWOSKIN

NEWARK, Nov. 28 — The [Federal Communications Commission](#) gave the public the opportunity on Wednesday to weigh in on whether a Fox-owned station with a unique relationship to New Jersey has earned the right to have its broadcast license renewed.

More than 100 people came to a lecture hall at the [Rutgers University](#) campus here to debate how well the affiliate, WWOR-TV, Channel 9, is fulfilling its mandate to provide coverage of issues important to the residents of northern New Jersey.

“When you pick up your remote and turn to Channel 9, you are not getting sufficient information about New Jersey’s schools, roads or neighborhoods,” said United States Senator [Frank R. Lautenberg](#), addressing the audience, which included news media watchdog groups, students and two F.C.C. commissioners, Michael J. Capps and Jonathan S. Adelstein.

“Routinely, the news is about New York, and New Jersey news is largely forgotten or buried deep into newscasts,” Mr. Lautenberg said.

The agency usually rubber-stamps license renewals. But after WWOR applied for a new license in February, community and media advocacy groups filed petitions demanding that the agency deny the request.

The petitioners acknowledge that it is highly unlikely that WWOR will lose its license. But the commissioners said the hearing was an opportunity to test the F.C.C.’s sensitivity to public concerns about how the airwaves were used. And for many New Jersey residents, it was a chance to vent their frustrations that the state gets shortchanged by the television and radio stations that cover it.

“I’ve been watching Channel 9 for years, and I was surprised to know that WWOR wasn’t a New York City station,” said Patrick V. Adams, a 19-year-old Rutgers student.

Many people complained that WWOR, which was acquired by Fox Television Stations in 2001 and is based in Secaucus, N.J., promotes itself as “My9 New York” and that the home page on the station’s Web site features an image of the New York skyline. (Less than two hours after the hearing, WWOR replaced the skyline image with one of the George Washington Bridge.)

Analyzing WWOR’s public reports to the F.C.C., Voice for New Jersey, a media advocacy group based in Plainfield, said that in 2006, WWOR gave almost 80 percent more broadcast time to stories about New York than to those about New Jersey.

WWOR's vice president, Lew Leone, responded to the criticism by showing a video that included clips of the station's New Jersey coverage. The video ended with the words "My9 and New Jersey: Perfect Together."

While all broadcasters have a principal obligation to provide coverage of the communities where they are licensed, WWOR has a special mandate. The station was located in New York City until 1982, when General Tire and Rubber, then WWOR's owner, faced losing the license because of a corporate misconduct scandal, according to Free Press, a media reform advocacy group. That year, Congress passed a law saying that any station that moved to New Jersey would have its license automatically renewed.

The F.C.C., in approving WWOR's move to New Jersey, said it expected the station "to provide a higher degree of service" than is normally required under a broadcast license. In his opening remarks, Mr. Adelstein acknowledged that the F.C.C. had never held WWOR to the higher standard.

Opponents of the license renewal included two groups from out of state, the United Church of Christ, based in Cleveland, and the Rev. [Jesse Jackson](#)'s RainbowPUSH Coalition in Chicago.

Those groups said they were frustrated because the News Corporation, the parent company of Fox Television Stations, also owns The New York Post and WNYW-TV, Channel 5, in New York City.

Federal law prohibits most companies from owning both a newspaper and a television station in the same metropolitan area. But Fox is one of 11 companies nationwide that hold a temporary waiver of the prohibition, said Andrew J. Schwartzman, president of the nonprofit Media Access Project.

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