



Watchdog Challenges TV Licenses

By Allison Romano -- Broadcasting & Cable, 11/1/2005 5:43:00 PM

Public interest telecommunications law firm Media Access Project is petitioning the Federal Communications Commission to deny station license renewals to every English-language TV station in Chicago and Milwaukee for failing "to meet the needs of their community of license."

In documents filed with the commission Tuesday, MAP President and CEO Andrew Schwartzman said TV stations in the two markets have failed to provide sufficient programming on last fall's state and local elections. According to the filing, less than 1% of newscasts were devoted to non-federal elections prior in the four-week period leading up to Election Day.

"No coverage at all of local elections can not be comported with [FCC] localism requirements," Schwartzman said.

The petitions are backed on a study conducted last fall by the Center for Media and Public Affairs surveying election coverage in the three markets—Chicago, Milwaukee and Portland—chosen for their varied market size and location in battleground states. The group examined newscasts and local programming on English-language broadcasters in the markets. The results, Schwartzman notes, showed virtually no coverage of non-federal elections in newscasts.

MAP is seeking the FCC revoke station licenses in the market. He says Chicago and Milwaukee were selected because license renewals for Illinois and Wisconsin are coming up soon and local groups were also interested in being involved.

The FCC adopted its current renewal rules in 1984, when it eliminated programming requirements for local news and public affairs. The commission, however, did point to local broadcasters' "basic responsibility to contribute to the overall discussion of issues confronting the community." Local elections, Schwartzman says, are a preeminent issue in communities and coverage is "one of the primary obligations a broadcaster has."

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