

## WASHINGTON

Verizon-MCI (Case UT-05-0814) Hearings Nov. 1-3 on compromise for conditional approval. Further steps not scheduled.

## WEST VIRGINIA

Verizon-MCI (Case 05-0349-T-PC) Record complete. Under advisement. Final vote not scheduled.

More Petitions Possible**MAP Claims Lack of Local News in Renewal Oppositions for Big-City Stations**

Media activists are trying to block license renewals at 20 TV stations, including all major stations in the Chicago and Milwaukee markets, because they carried little state and local political news. The first petition of its kind, filed by Media Access Project (MAP) on behalf of local groups, said less than 1% of news broadcasts in the 2 markets focused on local political issues such as candidates and referendums in the 4 weeks preceding last year's general election. "The amount of programming on state and local races of programming we monitored amounted to a rounding error," said MAP Exec. dir. Andrew Schwartzman: "This is the first time that anyone has filed a petition like this one."

In the Chicago market, stations including Viacom's WBBM-TV (Ch. 2, CBS), NBC Universal's WMAQ-TV (Ch. 5, NBC) and WLS-TV (Ch. 7, ABC), owned by Disney, have each "failed to meet the needs of their community," said the MAP filing. "Renewal of their licenses would not serve the public interest," the filing said, citing research MAP had done by the Center for Media & Public Affairs (CMPA). That study, which Schwartzman also called a first, found that local races accounted for a fraction of overall political coverage in the run-up to the 2004 election. In contrast, programming on the Presidential race and Senate bids represented 79% of all political news, CMPA found.

Milwaukee had a similar dearth of local electoral news. Information on Wis. elections and ballot initiatives comprised 4% of total political coverage, CMPA found. Asked why MAP, a group usually associated with liberal causes, worked with CMPA, Schwartzman said: "We wanted to produce something that would not be subjected to claims that this was some sort of politically driven thing, so we decided to pick an organization that would have credibility across the political spectrum," as CMPA's "generally been associated with social conservatives."

In 2004, coverage may have tilted to the Presidential election — and away from local issues -- because it was a "hotly contested" race, said a broadcast industry official. "Broadcasters got very high marks for covering the national presidential race," said the person, who asked not to be identified. "If it's a Presidential election year, obviously broadcasters are going to put a priority on covering a very close Presidential race." Major Milwaukee stations included in the petition are Journal Communications' WTMJ-TV (Ch. 4, NBC), WITI (Ch. 6, Fox), owned by that network, and Hearst-Argyle's WISN-TV (Ch. 12, ABC). Officials at some stations cited in the so-called blanket petition to deny license renewal weren't available. CMPA had no comment.

The TV properties were targeted because they're in the 2 states where licenses are up for renewal this month, said Schwartzman. "We're considering doing it in other markets," he said, declining to be more specific. Stations may operate while the FCC reviews petitions, said a Commission official. The FCC decides case by case if it will hold a hearing after reviewing a petition, the official said, adding that hearings are a rarity. Other Ill.-vicinity stations in the filing: WGN-TV (Ch. 9, WB), WCIU-TV (Ch. 26, independent), WFLD (Ch. 32, Fox), WCPX (Ch. 38, Pax), WSNS-TV (Ch. 44, Telemundo) and WPWR (Ch. 50, UPN), broadcasting to the market from Gary, Ind. The remaining Milwaukee stations targeted by MAP are WVTM (Ch. 18, WB), WCGC-TV (Ch. 24, UPN), WVCY-TV (Ch. 30, independent), WMLW, WDJT-TV (Ch. 58, CBS), WJJA (Ch. 49, independent) in Racine, WWRS-TV (52, TBN) in Mayville and WPXE (Ch. 55, Fox) in Kenosha. -- *Jonathan Make*