

# Cable, sat TV firms ask gov't to stop TV blackouts

March 10 2010, By DEBORAH YAO , AP Business Writer

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(AP) --The most recent showdown left millions of Cablevision Systems Corp. customers around New York without an ABC station at the start of the Academy Awards. About 15 minutes into the show, a scrolling announcement told viewers that a tentative agreement had been reached.

As advertising revenue has weakened, TV networks have begun to demand cash for their over-the-air programs rather than some of the advertising swaps that have been acceptable in the past.

Rising tensions between subscription TV providers and the networks have brought together rivals including Time Warner Cable Inc., [Dish Network](#) Corp., DirecTV Inc., [Verizon Communications](#) Inc. and even a consumer rights group often critical of the companies, Public Knowledge.

The group of 14 companies, consumer and trade groups sent a joint petition to the [Federal Communications Commission](#) on Tuesday, seeking a change in the way broadcasters give cable TV and other providers permission to carry local channels on their lineups.

One company was conspicuously absent from the petition. Comcast Corp., the nation's largest cable [TV operator](#), would become a broadcaster if its plan to take control of NBC Universal is approved.

The National Association of Broadcasters is not backing down.

"To see billion dollar pay TV companies asking for government intervention to protect their exorbitant profits is just plain wrong," the industry group said in a statement.

Early this year, Time Warner Cable customers faced the threat of losing their Fox stations, which broadcast shows like "The Simpsons," and "American Idol," during a standoff with News Corp., which owns Fox.

"Consumers are increasingly being put in the middle of disputes," Time Warner Cable said in a statement. "The petitioners implore the FCC to act expeditiously to help prevent further consumer harm."

Cable TV and other video providers are concerned that broadcasters have threatened to shut down, or actually ceased, TV signals when talks don't go their way. They want regulators to stop broadcasters from yanking TV signals during contract talks. They also want the FCC to put into place mandatory arbitration or other measures to resolve disputes.

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