

FCC demands information from Cablevision, Fox

October 22 2010, By JOELLE TESSLER , AP Technology Writer

(AP) -- With a contract dispute still keeping Fox programming off Cablevision systems, federal regulators are demanding information from both companies about the details of their negotiations.

Roughly 3 million Cablevision subscribers in the New York area have been cut off from baseball playoffs, "House" and other popular Fox shows since Fox pulled its programming a week ago in a battle over the fees that Cablevision pays. Unless there's an agreement, viewers will miss the final games of the National League playoffs this weekend between the San Francisco Giants and the Philadelphia Phillies.

With the blackout entering its second week, the [Federal Communications Commission](#) sent letters Friday to executives at [Cablevision Systems Corp.](#) and [News Corp.](#), which owns Fox. The FCC is asking the companies to describe how they are meeting a government mandate to negotiate in "good faith" and provide details about their efforts to reach a deal. The agency is also asking both companies to provide any evidence that the other side is not bargaining in good faith.

"Your contract dispute extends beyond just Fox and Cablevision," wrote William Lake, head of the FCC's media bureau. "It affects millions of innocent consumers who expect to watch their preferred broadcast programming without interruption. We urge you to place the interests of these consumers first and conclude your negotiations promptly."

The letter went to James Dolan, president and chief executive of

Cablevision, and Chase Carey, president and chief operating officer of News Corp.

Cablevision welcomed the FCC's involvement, which is likely to help the company in its dispute with Fox.

"Whether through FCC action, binding arbitration or any other means, the time has come for News Corp. to end the Fox blackout of 3 million Cablevision households," Charles Schueler, the company's executive vice president of communications, said in a statement.

Scott Grogin, a Fox spokesman, said only that the company will respond to the FCC. The company also put out a statement Friday urging Cablevision subscribers who want to see the World Series to switch video providers or purchase an over-the-air antenna. The World Series starts Wednesday.

As the programming blackout has dragged on, the FCC has come under mounting pressure to intervene.

The agency's chairman, Julius Genachowski, has publicly called on both companies to set aside their "petty gamesmanship" and negotiate in good faith. He has also called executives at both companies to urge them to reach a deal.

Michael Copps, another Democrat on the five-member commission, has gone even further. He said the FCC should "take a very serious look at whether 'good faith' negotiations are indeed occurring" and "move promptly to protect consumers" if they are not.

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