

Regulator to join Comcast after OK of NBC deal

May 11 2011, By JOELLE TESSLER , AP Technology Writer

(AP) -- A top telecommunications regulator who voted to approve Comcast Corp.'s takeover of NBCUniversal in January is leaving to join the company as a lobbyist.

Meredith Attwell Baker, one of two Republicans on the five-member Federal Communications Commission, will become senior vice president of government affairs for NBCUniversal.

Comcast said it did not begin discussions with Baker about a possible job until after the transaction had closed. Baker will leave the FCC on June 3, less than a month before her term was set to expire. She joined the agency in July 2009.

Craig Aaron, head of the public interest group Free Press, called the move an example of "business as usual in Washington - where the complete capture of government by industry barely raises any eyebrows."

Comcast, the nation's largest cable TV company, bought a controlling interest in NBCUniversal after the FCC and the Justice Department approved the deal with conditions following a yearlong review. The FCC's vote was 4-1.

Baker, 43, will be based in Washington and will report to Kyle McSlarrow, who joined Comcast in April to head the company's Washington operations. McSlarrow previously headed the National

Cable & Telecommunications Association, the cable industry's top trade group.

"I am privileged to have had the opportunity to serve the country at a time of critical transformation in the telecommunications industry," Baker said in a statement. "The continued deployment of our broadband infrastructures will meaningfully impact the lives of all Americans. I am happy to have played a small part in this success."

Such moves between the private sector and the government are common in Washington. Following McSlarrow's departure, former FCC Chairman Michael Powell took the helm the NCTA.

At the FCC, Baker was a reliable pro-business voice who frequently expressed concern that the agency was imposing unnecessary and onerous regulations on phone and cable companies.

Along with fellow Republican commissioner Robert McDowell, Baker opposed the controversial "network neutrality" rules approved by the commission's three Democrats last year. Those rules, which prohibit phone and cable companies from interfering with Internet traffic on their broadband networks, are now facing legal challenges from Verizon and Metro PCS.

The companies are suing the FCC in the same federal appeals court that ruled against the agency last year in a case involving Comcast. The court said the agency had exceeded its legal authority in sanctioning Comcast for discriminating against online file-sharing traffic on its broadband network. The FCC had said that Comcast violated broad net neutrality principles first established by the commission in 2005, which became the foundation of the formal rules adopted last year.

Before joining the FCC, Baker was head of the Commerce Department's

National Telecommunications and Information Administration, where she helped oversee the transition from analog to digital broadcasting.

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