

## **BWTELcom refusing broadcasters' demands to increase fees and rates**

Written by Wauneta Breeze

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BWTELcom will soon enter into retransmission negotiations with ABC, NBC and CBS to determine the rate that BWTELcom will need to pay for the right to carry off air channels such as ABC Channel 6 Hayes Center, NBC Channel 8 Oberlin, Kan., as well as Channel 10 Goodland, Kan., and Denver channels commonly referred to as 'retransmission consent fees.'

BWTELcom's policy is to reject increasing cable costs for their subscribers in order to pay vastly increased retransmission consent fees to off air broadcasters.

In a press release statement, BWTELcom General Manager Randall Raile stated "BWTELcom will not bow to the demands of off air broadcasters because we put the needs of customers first."

If an agreement is not reached by Dec. 31, 2011, the off air broadcasters will force BWTELcom to drop their respective channels — channels 6, 7, 8, 10 and channel 9 from Denver as well as 47 (CW) from Denver — from its channel lineup.

"It is unfortunate, and frankly disappointing, that the off air broadcasters would unreasonably put their own interests above those of the citizens of Wauneta," said Raile. "Our customers deserve better, and we will not allow our subscribers to be extorted in this way."

Across the country, broadcasters have been demanding dramatic fee increases from cable and satellite TV operators and threatening to withdraw their signals if their unreasonable terms are not met. "In our view, broadcasters' 'blackmail or blackout' strategy must not be allowed to succeed, especially when consumers provide TV stations valuable access to spectrum for free," notes the BWTELcom statement.

Since 1992, the federal government has given television broadcasters like those station owners the right to grant or deny cable operators use of their signal, in addition to exclusivity in the market. As a result, broadcasters have unrestrained leverage in negotiations with cable operators, particularly those who are small and medium-sized, over the price of retransmission. These negotiations are typically conducted every three years. To change this unfair law, Congress needs to take action, noted Raile.

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“Our customers want and deserve access to all of the off air channels to reach a mutually acceptable agreement to gain access to the off air channels,” said Raile. “However, we simply refuse to allow our customers to be extorted — especially when cable customers in more urban markets do not experience the price increases that smaller districts like ours do.”

The off air channels and BWTELcom have reached an agreement several times in the past for carriage of the signal on the cable system. This agreement has always been fair and reasonable, and reached without a disruption in service for BWTELcom customers.