



Legislation Text

File #: Res 31673, Version: 2

CITY OF SEATTLE

RESOLUTION _____

A RESOLUTION affirming the Seattle City Council’s commitment to high quality locally produced broadcast news to effectively inform the public in the case of emergencies.

WHEREAS, in 1949 KING 5 was established as the only broadcast television station in the Pacific Northwest, and under the leadership of Dorothy Bullitt, the first woman to buy and manage a television station in the United States, became one of the first local TV news operation in the country, with a national reputation for public service and innovation; and

WHEREAS, broadcast television stations use public spectrum airwaves owned by the people of the United States, under license from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and in that license are required to “render such broadcasting service as will serve the public interest” as trustees for the public; and

WHEREAS, residents and local governments rely on professional local broadcast television personnel to collect and disseminate vital information; including to provide real-time information during public emergencies (e.g., earthquakes, wildfires, and increasingly frequent extreme weather events) when other wireline and wireless communications and/or electric power distribution facilities may be disrupted; and

WHEREAS, the special responsibility of local broadcasters in public emergencies was recognized in 2015 by the Oregon Legislature through the enactment of Oregon House Bill 2210 (ORS 401.239); designating local broadcasters as “First Informers” to complement “First Responders” (fire, police, etc.) and allocating specific responsibilities and privileges to professional local broadcast staff in public emergencies; and

WHEREAS, in 2013 Tegna Inc. (formerly Gannett Co. Inc.) acquired ownership of the Belo Corporation, which owns KING 5; and

WHEREAS, IATSE 600 and IBEW 46 have reported that KING 5 has introduced cutbacks in their news operations, introducing a greater focus on repurposing the commodified news product broadcast by other stations owned by their parent company; and

WHEREAS, the contract proposal offered on January 7, 2016, by KING 5 to their unionized workers demanded “flexible jurisdiction” language that would allow the company to replace professional union workers with amateur, temporary, outsourced, or otherwise nonunion personnel; and

WHEREAS, professional journalists and technicians report that in February of 2016, KING 5 encouraged the early retirement of many of its most experienced employees; and

WHEREAS, if Tegna Inc. cuts costs by replacing and reducing its professional news-gathering staff, this precedent will be duplicated by other local broadcast news outlets in the Seattle area, severely undermining the critical role of local broadcasters as effective First Informers in public emergencies; and

WHEREAS, on January 10, 2016, the Boston Globe reported that on March 29, 2016, the FCC will allow broadcasters to sell federally licensed frequencies to the highest bidder, creating the means for venture capitalists to take control of publicly owned broadcast licenses for the purpose of profit maximization rather than service to local communities; and

WHEREAS, Tegna Inc., through the aforesaid policies and practices, operates contrary to the public interest;

NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SEATTLE THAT:

Section 1. It is the policy of the Seattle City Council that local broadcasters have a critical role in informing the public of emergencies, and, as in Oregon (ORS 401.239), should be legally designated “First Informers” with all the rights and responsibilities that entails. The Seattle City Council requests the Washington

State Legislature codify this with legislation giving local broadcasters special access to public emergencies, so that real-time information in times of crisis (e.g., earthquake, wildfire, and extreme weather), can be provided consistent with FCC broadcast license responsibilities.

Section 2. The Seattle City Council believes that the maintenance of professional, trained, local news staff at Seattle-area broadcast stations is critical to enable adequate coverage of local news and information, particularly in times of public emergencies, and to provide sufficient public information for an informed citizenry, and stimulate democratic discussion and debate. Substituting this local professional workforce with outsourced amateur or temporary journalists and technicians will undermine this critical functionality.

Section 3: The Seattle City Council requests and expects that Tegna Inc. will retain publicly owned airwaves currently used to broadcast KING 5, and maintain its professional quality unionized workforce to serve the public interest. The Seattle City Council further requests that Tegna Inc.'s labor negotiators at KING 5 bargain in good faith with IBEW 46 and IATSE 600 to meet the needs of their workforce and the public.

Section 4. The Seattle City Council requests and expects that all local Seattle broadcasters will fully disclose their plans for the FCC's March 29, 2016, spectrum auction, a sale of public airwaves, and any plans to substantially change longstanding contractual commitments to the FCC to provide professionally produced local news in alignment with public-interest responsibilities, including responsibilities as First Informers.

Section 5. The Seattle City Council affirms its commitment to high quality locally produced broadcast news serving the public interest over the publicly owned electronic spectrum.

Section 6. The Seattle City Council calls upon all public entities that may own Tegna stock to consider divestiture of said stock.

Adopted by the City Council the ____ day of _____, 2016, and signed by me in open session in authentication of its adoption this _____ day of _____, 2016.

President _____ of the City Council

Filed by me this ____ day of _____, 2016.

Monica Martinez Simmons, City Clerk

(Seal)