

**MEDIA**

# A media blob has come to Connecticut

5 HOURS AGO



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**L**ike it or not, a Connecticut television station is now part of a media conglomerate. The Federal Communications Commission just approved the sale of Media General's New Haven-based ABC affiliate WTNH to [Nexstar Media Group](http://www.nexstar.tv/) (<http://www.nexstar.tv/>), as part of a larger \$4.6 billion merger involving TV stations around the country. The deal [officially closed on Tuesday](http://www.adweek.com/tvspy/nexstar-closes-on-media-general-buy/184319). (<http://www.adweek.com/tvspy/nexstar-closes-on-media-general-buy/184319>) Nexstar now owns more than 170 stations covering 39 percent of American households. That's the maximum percentage allowed by the FCC.

The deal was controversial from the start, because it brings more TV stations under a fewer number of owners. Critics say that's dangerous because it reduces the diversity of voices within the media. When a small number of companies control a greater number of stations, there are fewer opportunities for competing voices, innovation in news coverage, or differentiation between TV stations. That, critics worry, will lead to greater commoditization of news, where viewers stop caring about where their news comes from, since they decide all stations look alike and cover the same stories.

But the issue is more than just an abstract thought. Viewers here in Connecticut may soon notice some changes on-air that go beyond a new name in the copyright at the end of WTNH's newscasts.

First, viewers may start to see some familiar faces go away. Nexstar executives may not like some popular anchors and reporters as much as Media General's leaders did. And even if staff members are asked to stay, they could decide to leave if they're offered new contracts for less money or with fewer benefits. That's what happened at WJLA, the ABC affiliate in Washington, D.C. [At least 16 on-air staff](http://ftvlive.squarespace.com/sqsp-test/2017/1/10/sinclair-dc-turnover) (<http://ftvlive.squarespace.com/sqsp-test/2017/1/10/sinclair-dc-turnover>) have left or been let go since another massive ownership group, [Sinclair Broadcast Group](http://sbgi.net/) (<http://sbgi.net/>), bought the station in 2014. That number includes three of the station's four main anchors.

We could also see a change in news philosophy. Anyone who's watched WTNH has heard the question – "Who's got your back?" The station has built a brand on being a consumer watchdog that looks out for the little guy. That philosophy runs through the stories producers pick, how the stories are presented on-air, and how reporters report the

news. But Nexstar may not have the same philosophy. If its executives decide to go in a different branding direction, the answer to the question may no longer be “News 8.”

Viewers may also start to see some cost-cutting on air. WTNH’s new owners just spent billions of dollars buying dozens of TV stations. They’ll want to recoup that money as quickly as possible. That means cutbacks on what stations can spend on things like new equipment, new hires, and reporter travel. The stations will be asked to do more with less, in order to increase profits.

Viewers may also see a different look on-air. Nexstar could decide to standardize the TV graphics, music, and news sets across all its stations. Ownership groups do this to save money (why buy hundreds of different licenses for music and graphics when you could buy an umbrella license?) and to make it easier for stations to share content and behind-the-scenes operations. Fellow mega-ownership group Sinclair is already experimenting with this type of outsourcing. It recently announced (<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/sinclair-announces-production-efficiencies-for-toledo-station-300369754.html>) it’s moving the technical aspects of its Toledo, Ohio newscast 160 miles away to its station in South Bend, Indiana to improve what it calls “production efficiencies.”

Finally, WTNH’s website (<http://wtnh.com/>) may get a facelift. The look-and-feel favored by Media General may not be the style Nexstar wants to use. The new owners may also not be fans of locally-written web stories. With 170 TV stations nationwide, Nexstar may find it more cost-effective to update web sites from a central hub. That means fewer stories written locally, and more reliance on national news or feature articles that can be read in many cities around the country, without a Connecticut-centric angle.

So what can be done to stop “news blobs” like this from spreading? The answer is, not much. Until the FCC changes its rules and stops approving mega-mergers, media owners will continue to find it more profitable to be big. But while they profit, viewers and station employees could be the ones paying the price.

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