

Proposed Tribune acquisition could send familiar faces packing

By Luther Turmelle, New Haven Register

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Expect to see some familiar faces in the Fox 61 WTIC newsroom leaving the Hartford-New Haven market if Sinclair Broadcasting's \$3.9 billion acquisition of Tribune Media Co. gets the necessary federal approval, Ben Bogardus, a veteran broadcaster and assistant professor of journalism at Quinnipiac University, said Monday.

Bogardus said Sinclair Broadcasting's business philosophy is to reduce newsroom payroll by not renewing the contracts of higher-priced on-air anchors and reporters. Sinclair already owns 173 television stations around the country and will add 42 more if the Tribune Media acquisition is approved.

"They believe people will watch the news for the value of the stories, not because of a particular anchor," Bogardus said. Before coming to Quinnipiac, Bogardus worked as a producer at Washington, D.C., television station WJLA, but left shortly after the broadcast outlet was acquired by Sinclair.

Bogardus said the news sets and websites of the Tribune Media television stations that Sinclair is acquiring likely would change over time, as well.

Chris Ripley, president and chief executive officer of Sinclair, made references to the cost-cutting measures likely coming to Tribune Media stations if the Federal Communications Commission approves the deal.

"The acquisition will also create substantial synergistic value through operating efficiencies, revenue streams, programming strategies and digital platforms," Ripley said in a statement.

The timing of the deal makes it unlikely the Federal Communications Commission will reject Sinclair's purchase of the 42 stations owned by Tribune Media, including Fox 61 and WCCT in the Hartford-New Haven market, he said.

"Traditionally, this kind of deal would have been opposed in the past because it reduces the number of television station owners in a given market," Bogardus said. "But the Trump administration's new FCC chairman has signaled that he favors increasing the number of stations a company can own in a market."

FCC rules currently restrict the national TV audience that any single owner can reach at 39 percent. Regulations also prohibit any owner from running more than two stations in most markets.

Officials with Sinclair said Monday they are willing to sell certain stations in markets where both the company and Tribune Media both have broadcast outlets. The decisions about which stations Sinclair will sell "will be determined through the regulatory approval process," company officials said in a statement.

Sinclair, headquartered in suburban Baltimore, currently doesn't own any television stations in the Hartford-New Haven market. Acquiring Tribune Media would give Sinclair ownership of some of the best-known local television stations in the United States: WGN in Chicago, WPIX in New York City, KTLA in Los Angeles.

The deal is expected to close during the fourth quarter of this year, Sinclair officials said.

Sinclair has promoted [conservative leaning programming](#) and there is speculation [the company might use its acquisition of the Tribune Media properties as a springboard to create a national network of its own](#) to challenge Fox News.

“It’s a pretty good possibility because the Tribune deal gives them a more national footprint,” Bogardus said.

If Sinclair were to launch a national news network to rival Fox, it likely would operate separate from the local stations, Bogardus said. But the network would make use of the local stations newsroom and studio infrastructure, he said.

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