

EDITORIAL

PBS

People's treasure

PUBLIC broadcasting is a jewel, a valuable alternative amid the cacophony of commercial stations. Owned by the people, PBS airs operas, Shakespeare plays, folk festivals, symphonies, lectures, foreign films and many other attractions not available via for-profit broadcasting.

West Virginia's public television network is localized with Mountain State information and entertainment — programming needed by West Virginians.

Therefore, it's distressing that an up-state cable TV system stopped providing WVPBS to part of homes in a northern swath from panhandle to panhandle. When Comcast switched to digital service, it continued sending the state-owned broadcasting to families with digital receivers, but refused to put WVPBS in its basic tier for nondigital customers. Instead, it carried a Pittsburgh PBS station.

If nondigital West Virginia families want WVPBS, Comcast requires them to use converter boxes, which Comcast provides free for the first year.

Protests arose. Delegate Barbara Fleischauer, D-Monongalia, wanted the Legislature to pass a bill forcing all West Vir-

ginia cable systems to carry WVPBS fully. "We have invested millions in West Virginia Public Broadcasting," she said. "It's a public policy issue."

State Sen. Mike Oliverio, D-Monongalia, said Comcast "duped" the state-owned broadcasting network in a 2005 agreement now cited as the legal basis for Comcast's curtailment of WVPBS. He

says state broadcasting officials were "taken advantage of."

Morgantown City Council and Rep. Shelley Capito, R-W.Va., entered the uproar. Protesters asked Gov. Manchin to include this issue in his mandate to the current special ses-

sion of the Legislature — but it wasn't done.

We think Comcast voluntarily should do the right thing and include the high-quality programming. We bet the cable system quickly would extend digital service to money-generating shows such as baldness-curing infomercials or evangelist revivals.

Eventually, when all families are digital-ready, we assume that this dispute will cease. In the meantime, it's shabby for a cable corporation to downgrade the finest available programming.



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BARBARA FLEISCHAUER
Delegate, D-Monongalia