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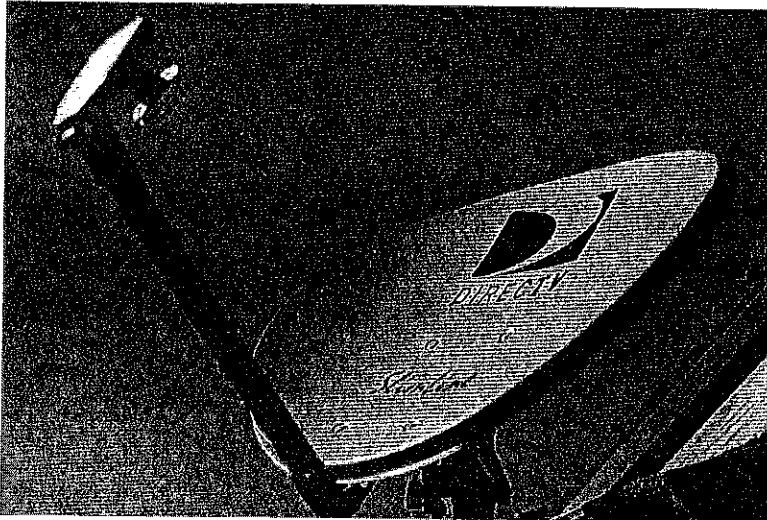
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The Right's Wrong Attack on DirecTV Over Newsmax

A commercial dispute isn't about censoring conservatives.

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A DirecTV satellite dish

PHOTO: MIKE BLAKE/MIKE BLAKE/ REUTERS

Bashing business is in political fashion, and more than a few Republicans are joining the progressive pastime. Witness the conservative pressure campaign against satellite provider DirecTV, which is in a carriage dispute with the right-leaning Newsmax network.

DirecTV last month dropped Newsmax from its channel lineup after the two parties failed to agree on licensing fees. Carriage disputes over fees are common and sometimes result in channel blackouts. But they are fundamentally no different than other contract negotiations between businesses.

Newsmax says DirecTV won't compensate it fairly for content and is paying more to carry liberal news channels. But DirecTV claims Newsmax is demanding tens of millions of dollars to license content that the network makes available for free on the web and via streaming

devices like Roku. The pay-TV industry is declining, DirecTV says, as content costs are rising, while “more networks, like Newsmax, go straight to consumers through ‘over-the-top’ services.”

Newsmax ranks 12th among news channels in viewership behind many small liberal channels, DirecTV says. The channel’s average nationwide audience is 101,000 households—less than 0.1% of those with TVs—according to Nielsen ratings. DirecTV believes Newsmax’s value doesn’t justify the fees it’s demanding.

We take no side in this business dispute, and it’s bewildering why many Republicans are getting involved. Forty-two House Republicans last month wrote a letter to DirecTV executives and its joint owners, AT&T and TPG, threatening to investigate the TV provider for colluding with the government to suppress conservative voices.

Sens. Ted Cruz, Lindsey Graham, Mike Lee and Tom Cotton piled on this month with a letter suggesting DirecTV may have dropped Newsmax because of “pressure from administration officials or Democrats in Congress” and “may be the latest example of big business suppressing politically disfavored speech at the behest of liberal Democrats.”

Their evidence? A letter from Democratic Reps. Anna Eshoo and Jerry McNerney to AT&T CEO John Stankey last February calling for the company to combat misinformation spread by conservative news networks. A letter from two Democratic Congress Members, which was also sent to other TV providers, doesn’t add up to a vast leftwing conspiracy. The Fox News channel, where these pages have a news program, is also a Democratic target.

DirecTV notes that it helped launch Newsmax in 2014 and recently launched the new conservative channel called “The First,” which will increase diversity and competition among conservative voices. Newsmax CEO Chris Ruddy doesn’t want that. Instead, he is trying to bring political and government pressure to bear on DirecTV to force the satellite operator to carry the channel on Newsmax’s terms.

Mr. Ruddy endorsed President Biden’s progressive Federal Communications Commission nominee Gigi Sohn in November 2021, ostensibly for this reason. In a statement supporting Ms. Sohn, Mr. Ruddy said that Newsmax is “being sidelined in favor of a small number of mega-corporations who dominate the channel line-ups” and praised her commitment to the “Commission’s mandate to promote diversity, localism, and competition in the marketplace.”

As we noted at the time, it's an odd sort of conservative who supports a left-wing nominee who wants to be a speech regulator. It's also odd for conservatives who complain that Democrats are pressuring social-media companies to suppress their views to now bully TV providers to broadcast them.

Political coercion of business is as distasteful from the right as it is from the left.

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