

# DAILY NEWS

## New York Daily News: New Jersey, media desert

By Congressman Bill Pascrell and Senator Robert Menendez

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Though New Yorkers may disagree, in our view, Garden Staters are right to brag that New Jersey is the center of the universe. Our self-regard is well-grounded: Few other states can boast our diversity of culture, cuisine, recreation and geography. But when it comes to news, despite being one of the largest states in the union, New Jersey is a desert.

Sandwiched between New York and Philadelphia, New Jersey lacks its own designated market area. As a result, we often find coverage of our state affairs dominated by events occurring in our mega-metropolis neighbors.

Stated less diplomatically, big-city media sees the Garden State as playing second fiddle to the exploits of the Big Apple and the City of Brotherly Love. (We are grateful to have this opinion piece appear in a leading New York newspaper, a sign that this isn't always the case.) Combined with the slow demise of our local papers, the result is that too often, people in our state are hard-pressed to find information about the happenings of our 566 cities and towns.

It might be news to many people in our region that for nearly 40 years, New Jersey has had its own broadcast station: WWOR, based in Secaucus and now owned by the Fox Corp. That fact is news to most of us because our so-called New Jersey station refuses to cover New Jersey. Its once bustling newsroom shut down years ago, and its Secaucus studios have since been sold and demolished.

Despite its longstanding operations in our state, WWOR's New Jersey coverage would give the impression we don't exist since it covers virtually nothing here. Where broadcast stations operating in the New York and Philadelphia media markets dedicate an average of [56 hours each week](#) to news and public affairs on their areas, WWOR dedicates a pitiful 30 minutes.

What is WWOR showing instead? A cursory glance at [its programming](#) one day this week turns up blocs of "Divorce Court," three hours of "Family Feud," and an episode of "Maury" titled "A One-Night Stand or My Ex-Husband... Who's My Baby's Daddy?"

Many Americans may not realize, but a broadcast license is valuable public property. A station that possesses one holds a public trust. In return, it must provide a service in the form of news and public affairs programming to the communities within its coverage area.

Indeed, when the Federal Communications Commission gave WWOR the green light to operate in New Jersey, it specifically stipulated that WWOR “devote itself to meeting the special needs of its new community (and the needs of the Northern New Jersey area in general).”

By not generating proper local news coverage on its station, WWOR has ignored the law and failed our state’s 9.2 million residents.

WWOR’s lack of Garden State coverage is not breaking news. While the station’s news operation was shuttered in 2013, the outlet’s dereliction traces back decades. For years, the late Sen. Frank Lautenberg pursued a one-man crusade to call out WWOR.

Late last year, the FCC wisely denied Fox’s request for [a permanent waiver](#) to own WWOR and several newspapers that would have, for all intents and purposes, allowed WWOR to ignore its legal duties to New Jersey with impunity.

Regrettably, the FCC renewed WWOR’s license in 2018 for another decade over the opposition of many New Jerseyans. The agency also refuses to impose lesser sanctions on WWOR than revoking its license, claiming it lacks the evidence necessary to impose penalties on WWOR for failing to comply with its New Jersey news requirements.

Our state has waited long enough. So on June 24, we introduced bicameral legislation along with Sen. Cory Booker to give the FCC the tools to finally hold WWOR to its legal obligations to New Jersey. Furthermore, stations like WWOR will be compelled to consult with local leaders and the communities they serve on what it puts on the air to ensure the region is covered.

Another broadcast media outlet covering New Jersey might not be great news for state officials and politicians, but we’re fine with that: as it is with photosynthesis, sunlight is the most essential element to a healthy government.

The failure of WWOR to cover New Jersey cities and towns is part of the larger tragic atrophy of local, independent media. There is little doubt that our inability to obtain incisive journalism about our own communities is a driving cause of our growing national divisions. A healthy democracy rests on the bedrock foundation of a vibrant, independent press — not reruns of “Family Feud.” New Jerseyans deserve better.

*Rep. Pascrell represents parts of Bergen, Hudson and Passaic Counties in the U.S. House.  
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