

Proposed compromise by broadcast group to offer to put some political files online but not all is unacceptable.

Broadcast Groups Offer to Put Some Political File Info Online

Compromise puts info including media buyer, candidate and entity that paid for the ads on their own Websites or and FCC Website

A host of broadcast groups have proposed a compromise solution to the FCC's proposal that they put their entire political file into an FCC-managed national database of TV station public inspection file information.

According to a filing at the FCC, Barrington, Belo, Gannett, Hearst, Scripps, Meredith, Raycom, and Post-Newsweek, among others, have suggested that the stations could put some of that info either on their own Websites or an FCC Website, with the name of the media buyer, the candidate, and the entity that paid for the ads or programming time, as well as the aggregate amount paid for the spots. The file would be updated weekly during election seasons, as well as the day before the election, and once a month otherwise.

The FCC has proposed creating an FCC-managed online database to which stations would have to upload material related to political ad buys "immediately."

"Existing FCC requirements for stations' local political files for purchase of political spots and political program material would remain the same," they said. Stations are required to keep on file and in writing specifics about each political time buy, including the schedule of ads, when they aired, the rates charged, and under what classes of time.

The broadcast groups' alternative would be to give the station the option of putting some, but not all of that, information online, either keeping it local on their own site or, if they chose, making it available on an FCC site.

But the information would be less granular -- aggregate amount of a buy, for example-- than the written files the groups are suggesting broadcasters would continue alongside the more limited online disclosure, and stations would have the option not to make it part of an FCC database.

Free Press and other members of the Public Interest Public Airwaves Coalition (PIPAC), which has been pushing for greater online disclosure, says the compromise is inadequate and

exempts information the public should have more readily available to it. For one thing, they said, allowing stations not to put the information in an FCC database defeats the FCC's goal of having an easily searchable repository of the information.

Broadcasters argue converting the entirety of their political files to online would be a paperwork burden and pull resources from other areas. PIPAC says keeping written political files and a different online file would be more work. It also said the station group proposal could exclude expenditures by Super PACs.

Other groups supporting the compromise were Cox, Dispatch and Schurz Communications.