In Brief

NBC-TV last week dropped its affiliate of 40 years, WROC-TV Rochester, N.Y., to switch to CBS affiliate WHEC-TV. John Damiano, VP of operations for NBC affiliate relations, attributed switch to WROC-TV's poor ratings performance in news: "We are trying to make network news better, and this is part of that effort." The February Arbitron results for 68th market show early news led by ABC affiliate WOKR with 23 rating/43 share; WHEC-TV second with 14/27, and WROC-TV with a 3/6. NBC numbers show WROC-TV up 5% in household prime time delivery for February, compared to national average of 4%. All three affiliates are VHF stations with antennas at same location. Ralph Becker, managing general partner of WROC-TV's parent, Television Station Partners, acknowledged station provided poor ratings lead-in to *NBC Nightly News*, but defended operation's journalistic quality and added: "There must be a hidden agenda. NBC has been talking about the importance of clearances and yet they switch to a station that last year preempted CBS for 86¾ hours; our preemptions of NBC were only 24 hours." Move still leaves WHEC-TV parent, Viacom, with two CBS affiliates; it already has two NBC affiliates. WHEC-TV General Manager Arnold Klinsky said that serious affiliation negotiations had been going on for month. Klinsky said WHEC-TV hopes to switch in time for start of fall season, but that decision rests with WROC-TV and CBS.

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Looking for compromise

In the face of the increasing unlikelihood that a single, worldwide HDTV production standard will be adopted, CBS Inc., which has advocated the 1,125/60 SMPTE 240M standard, is proposing compromise with the Europeans who support the rival Eureka-95 1,250/50 system. At the same time, he is advising the State Department, which represents U.S. broadcasters in the International Radio Consultative Committee (CCIR), not to give up the ultimate goal of a world standard.

In a letter to Secretary of State James Baker, Joseph Flaherty, CBS vice president and general manager, engineering and development, said that during CCIR meetings in Geneva next month, the U.S. should try to come to agreement on as many HDTV production system parameters as possible. Then, rather than pushing for adoption of 1,125/60 as a world standard next year during the CCIR plenary meeting (which marks the end of the group's four-year study period), the U.S. should delay selection of a world standard until the 1994 plenary session.

Leo Burnett ad agency, largest single buyer of barter time, **has made its first buy for 1989-90 syndication season,** with $2.4 million commitment for 233 units in off-network *Highway to Heaven*, one of two off-network series with barter time (other being *Cosby*). Burnett, representing such clients as Kellogg and Pillsbury, has option to buy up to 520 units, about 20% of availabilities in Genesis-distributed *Highway*. Genesis is guaranteeing 4.0 national rating for program, cleared primarily in early fringe. *Highway* has currently cleared 60% of country, with Genesis projecting 80% clearance by fall.

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Federal Broadcasting has reached **definitive agreement to sell** its **WMCA(AM) New York to Salem Communications for $15 million,** according to station General Manager Frank Oxarart. Deal coincides with Salem sale of religious-formatted WNYM(AM) New York to Radio Vision Christiana Management Corp. for $13 million. Talk format at WMCA(AM) is expected to remain with slight variations, said Oxarart.

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Nielsen issued **February 1989 Cassandra syndication ratings report.** Top 10 shows (with 50% coverge or more) and average rating: *Wheel of Fortune* (17), *Jeopardy* (14.3), *Cosby Show* (12.1), *Oprah Winfrey* (11.8), *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (9.9), *Current Affair* (8.4), *Donahue* (7.9), *Family Feud* (7.9), *Night Court* (7.9), and *Entertainment Tonight* (7.8). By comparison, February 1988 results: *Wheel* (18.8), *Jeopardy* (14.4), *Oprah* (11.6), *Donahue* (8.4), *People's Court* (8.4), *Win, Lose or Draw* (8.2), *Family Ties*, (8.1), *Cheers* (7.6), *M*A*S*H* (7.5) and *Entertainment Tonight* (7.0).

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National Association of Broadcast Employes and Technicians held local "informational" meetings last week to review final contract proposal from ABC. Union will vote on ABC proposal beginning April 17 with results to be announced May 3. While NABET negotiating committee has recommended against acceptance of ABC proposal, strike authorization is not being sought in vote, said John Krieger, assistant to union's network coordinator. Krieger said for proposal to be accepted, it must be approved, in simple majority vote, by all of union's 19 units.

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FCC may act during full meeting **this Wednesday** (April 12) to change rules on AM signal emissions **by mandating observance of National Radio Systems Committee standards.** Commission has proposed either implementation of NRSC-1 audio standard,

Justice sees no problems with Time, Warner merger

The Department of Justice has cleared the way for the proposed merger of Time Inc. and Warner Communications Inc. into what will be world's largest media and entertainment company. Charles F. Rule, assistant attorney general in charge of the antitrust division, said the department had concluded that the merger, announced last month, is not likely to reduce competition substantially in any relevant market.

The proposal has had its critics. Senator Howard Metzenbaum (D-Ohio), chairman of the Senate antitrust subcommittee, who is to hold hearings on the matter this week, had asked the Justice Department to conduct "a thorough investigation" when the merger was announced. He said at the time that the two companies own "premium cable programing" providers and major chains of cable systems. The ability of the merged entity to control both the delivery system and the content of programing "poses the greatest threat to consumers," since they would have "no protection against unrestrained price hikes." He also said the new vertically integrated entity could deny programing to competitors.

But Rule said the department had found no basis for concern after examining the horizontal and vertical effects of the merger in a number of markets, including motion picture production and distribution, cable television programing and distribution systems, record and magazine distribution, music publishing and magazine and book publishing. "We determined," he said, "that the merger would not violate Section 7 of the Clayton Act in any of these markets, and we would not sue to enjoin the transaction." The merger is to be accomplished by an exchange of stock, with Warner shareholders exchanging each of their shares, in a tax-free transaction, for 0.465 shares of Time stock.

Rule's statement did not appear to ease the concerns of the the Wireless Cable Association, which competes with cable and which was the only industry to appear in opposition to the proposed merger when the House subcommittee on economic and commercial law held a hearing on it, last month. "It's not surprising that this Justice Department approved the merger," said Nick Allard, counsel to the association. "We would have hoped it would take a more careful look, at least with respect to the cable aspects of the merger to assure itself that the deal will not harm consumers or potential competitors."