DirecTV puts Newsmax back on the air after Republicans' angry protests



Enlarge / Newsmax logo displayed at the National Rifle Association's annual meeting in Houston, Texas on May 28, 2022.
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Two months after dumping Newsmax instead of paying a new fee, DirecTV has reached a deal to put the conservative news network back in the satellite provider's channel lineup.

Newsmax had waged an aggressive public relations campaign against DirecTV. "This is a blatant act of political discrimination and censorship against Newsmax," Newsmax CEO Christopher Ruddy said on January 25 in an article on the network's website.

Newsmax changed its tune today when announcing the deal that will put Newsmax back on DirecTV starting tomorrow. "While we raised the issue of censorship relating to our removal, we now believe in DirecTV's commitment to distributing diverse viewpoints, including conservative ones," Newsmax said in a statement provided to Ars.

Ruddy provided a statement for DirecTV's press release today, saying that "Newsmax recognizes and appreciates that DirecTV clearly supports diverse voices, including conservative ones."

GOP lawmakers slammed DirecTV

Newsmax previously hired former US Rep. Jack Kingston (R-Ga.) as a lobbyist in its fight against DirecTV and had allies in Congress. A letter from 42 Republican lawmakers to the CEOs of AT&T and DirecTV claimed that DirecTV appears to be "actively working to limit conservative viewpoints on its system."

The letter from Republican lawmakers also claimed that Democrats coordinated with private companies to launch an "un-democratic assault on free speech." AT&T owns 70 percent of DirecTV.

DirecTV had carried Newsmax since 2014 but told Ars in January that it never paid Newsmax under the previous deal. With Newsmax demanding a carriage fee that allegedly amounted to tens of millions of dollars, DirecTV said the "demands for rate increases would have led to significantly higher costs that we would have to pass on to our broad customer base."

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No extra cost for DirecTV users

DirecTV said in an announcement today that "Newsmax will be available on DirecTV, DirecTV Stream, and U-verse at no additional cost to customers." This seems to suggest that if DirecTV is paying Newsmax anything under the new deal, it's a much smaller amount than Newsmax requested.

DirecTV CEO Bill Morrow said, "Through our persistent negotiations, we reached a resolution under mutually agreeable business terms allowing us to deliver the conservative news network at the right value—a reflection of the free market at work."

A DirecTV spokesperson declined to tell Ars today whether the satellite company agreed to pay Newsmax, saying that "terms of

the renewal—which includes a multi-year distribution deal—were not disclosed."

"This deal marks the end of a months-long carriage dispute that stemmed from financial differences with Newsmax and is ending with an agreement that comes at no additional cost to our customers," DirecTV said. "It has always been our desire to provide Newsmax, and never about limiting conservative voices, a view that Newsmax now recognizes and accepts."

Cable and satellite TV providers have consistently blamed carriage disputes on networks seeking higher payments. "This agreement marks DirecTV's latest successful resolution of a carriage dispute, an unfortunate but increasingly frequent occurrence involving nearly every pay TV and streaming provider attempting to keep rising consumer costs in check," DirecTV said today.

DirecTV said it has "resolved public disputes with approximately 50 programmers or station groups" in the past five years, with those battles typically lasting a few days or weeks but "extending to several months in some instances."

DirecTV called Newmax attacks false and troubling

When the dispute erupted in January, Newsmax claimed DirecTV pays license fees "to all 22 liberal news and information channels it carries" even though "most of the channels have much lower ratings than Newsmax."

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Newsmax didn't initially identify the 22 allegedly liberal news and information channels carried by DirecTV. Newsmax later provided a list that included major broadcast networks as well as more surprising entries like the Comedy Channel and The Weather Channel.

A few weeks into the now-resolved dispute, DirecTV criticized Newsmax for using its news platform to wage its battle against DirecTV.

“It’s troubling that Newsmax is using its news/editorial platform to publish inaccurate and misleading information regarding our contract dispute,” DirecTV wrote on February 15. “Each day, the news outlet is publishing nearly two dozen blogs on its website and dozens of posts on its main social handle, creating targeted content for its commentators, leveraging its network of contributors and dedicating significant airtime each hour to our business dispute. In our view, these efforts are obscuring facts in pursuit of Newsmax’s own commercial interests, not elucidating the news.”

DirecTV’s previous decision to drop One America News also led to a public outcry from Republican lawmakers, but OAN hasn’t returned to the TV service. OAN sued DirecTV and lost a key ruling in January when a California judge said its deal with DirecTV did not entitle it to a renewal.

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) called Newsmax’s new deal with DirecTV “a victory for free speech over powerful corporations that want to put their thumbs on the scale of the national conversation.” Cruz claimed that pressure from lawmakers forced DirecTV’s hand.

“This outcome speaks to the power of citizens and their elected representatives working to stop viewpoint discrimination,” Cruz said. “I’m grateful to my colleagues, Senators Lindsey Graham, Mike Lee, and Tom Cotton, for joining me in this fight.”

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