

Comcast's Web of Lobbying and Philanthropy

WASHINGTON — Only a few hours had passed after the \$45 billion merger between [Comcast](#) and [Time Warner Cable](#) was announced last week when an early voice emerged endorsing the giant deal.

“Win-win situation for American businesses,” said the statement from the [United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce](#).

It was the start of what Comcast executives acknowledge will be a carefully orchestrated campaign, as the company will seek hundreds of such expressions of support for the deal — from members of Congress, state officials and leaders of nonprofit and minority-led groups — as it tries to nudge federal authorities to approve the merger.

But what the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce did not mention in its statement praising the transaction was that it had collected at least \$320,000 over the last five years from Comcast's charitable foundation, which is run in part by David L. Cohen, the Comcast executive who oversees the corporation's government affairs operations.

It is a hint, critics say, of just how sophisticated Comcast's lobbying machine is, an enterprise that, like the company itself, reaches across the United States and has more than [100 registered lobbyists](#) in Washington alone.

That team, as of the end of last year, featured five former members of Congress. But it also included [Meredith Attwell Baker](#), who left the Federal Communications Commission in 2011 to help lead Comcast's internal lobbying office in Washington — just five months after she voted to approve a big deal for Comcast, its takeover of NBCUniversal.

“This is the era we live in — of big money,” said Michael J. Copps, another former F.C.C. member, who left in 2011. He says the Comcast and Time Warner Cable deal will result in too great a concentration of control over the nation's cable and broadband Internet

networks. “They leave no stone unturned when they get into one of these efforts,” he said.

Mr. Cohen said such criticism was unwarranted, as Time Warner Cable and Comcast do not serve any of the same markets nationwide.

But he and other company executives conceded that Comcast had been working since the deal was announced to organize a comprehensive push for approval — an effort that includes not only former congressional aides who will lobby the Democrats or Republicans they once worked with, but even distinct teams to focus on specific ethnic groups.











And Mr. Cohen adamantly rejected any suggestion that the corporation’s history of supporting nonprofit groups and charities, particularly groups that serve African-Americans, Latinos and Asians, was motivated by a desire to build political allies.

“People would like to take this 20-plus-year-old incredible commitment to communities and these organizations and would like to make it a bad thing — that we are buying off support for the transaction,” Mr. Cohen said in an interview, referring to the Comcast Foundation’s \$140 million in grants since its inception and more than \$3.2 billion since 2001 when all kinds of corporate support (cash and in-kind support like free public service announcements) are included. “That is simply not true. And I believe it is offensive to the organizations we support.”

A Network of Support for Comcast









During Comcast's last major deal, in which it took over NBCUniversal, at least 54 different groups that expressed support for the deal — by sending letters to the Federal Communications Commission or signing agreements — had received contributions from Comcast's charitable foundation, according to analysis by Center for Public Integrity and The New York Times.

Amount received

Group	from the Comcast Foundation, 2004-12	Document link
National Council of La Raza	\$2,205,000	
National Urban League	\$835,000	
Congressional Black Caucus Foundation*	\$350,000	
Hispanic Federation (N.Y.)	\$345,000	
U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce	\$320,000	
Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute	\$300,000	
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)	\$260,000	
National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators	\$250,000	
Women in Cable Telecommunications	\$245,000	
National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials	\$220,000	
Elijah Cummings Youth Program in Israel	\$180,000	
Urban League of Greater Hartford (Conn.)	\$176,000	
Inclusion Center for Community and Justice (Utah)	\$168,000	
National Puerto Rican Coalition	\$155,000	
Congressional Hispanic Leadership Institute	\$155,000	
Knoxville Area Urban League	\$146,170	
Asian Pacific Islander American Public Affairs Association (Calif.)	\$125,000	
Hispanas Organized for Political Equality (Calif.)	\$125,000	
ASPIRA Association	\$125,000	
Urban League of Detroit and Southeastern Michigan	\$117,330	
Latin American Economic Development Association (N.J.)	\$116,469	
Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh	\$111,081	

Latino Community Foundation	\$100,000
National Conference of Black Mayors	\$95,000
Urban League of Portland (Ore.)	\$95,000
Memphis Urban League	\$95,000
Urban League of Greater Atlanta	\$91,000
Cuban American National Council	\$90,000
Amigos Together for Kids (Fla.)	\$76,000
Tejano Center for Community Concerns (Tex.)	\$67,000
Urban League of Springfield (Ill.)	\$66,000
Tacoma Urban League	\$63,000
Latin American Association (Ga.)	\$56,950
Centro de la Familia de Utah	\$55,100
Northern Virginia Urban League	\$55,000
Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services	\$52,280
Urban League of Middle Tennessee	\$50,500
National Black Caucus of State Legislators	\$50,000
Latin American Youth Center (D.C.)	\$48,000
Urban League of Hudson County (N.J.)	\$46,730
Urban League of Union County (N.J.)	\$45,600
Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center	\$42,300
Greater Washington Urban League (D.C.)	\$40,000
N.A.A.C.P.	\$30,000
American Conference on Diversity (N.J.)	\$25,000
August Wilson Center for African American Culture (Penn.)	\$20,000



National Association of Black County Officials	\$20,000	
National Organization of Black Elected Legislative Women	\$20,000	
Spanish Community Center of Joliet (Ill.)	\$15,000	
Chinese Mutual Aid Association (Ill.)	\$15,000	
Centro Hispano Spanish American Civic (Penn.)	\$10,000	
National League of Cities	\$10,000	
Latino Memphis	\$7,569	
Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Pittsburgh	\$2,109	

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Comcast is recognized nationally for its commitment to promoting diversity — both on the air and in the employment ranks at the television channels and cable systems it owns, efforts expanded after the NBC deal as a condition to its approval.

Recent additional actions include the start-up of several minority-owned channels on its cable networks, like [Aspire](#), begun by the former National Basketball Association star Magic Johnson, and [BabyFirstAmericas](#), a Hispanic-focused English-language channel. Comcast, as part of the NBC merger deal, also offers inexpensive broadband Internet access to poor families nationwide, a program that has more than 260,000 subscribers.

Leaders of several minority groups said Comcast did not simply donate money to their groups. It also funds programs to try to improve economic opportunities for minorities, they said.

“You want us to support this?” said [Alex Nogales](#), chief executive of the National Hispanic Media Coalition, in an interview, recalling a meeting at Comcast headquarters in March 2010 with Mr. Cohen and other top company officials, as they sought support from his group and other Hispanic groups for the NBC merger, [support it received after](#) expanding its commitments. “Then tell me what is there in this deal for Latino

communities and other communities of color.”

The merger with NBC offers a case study of how central a role this network of nonprofit groups can play when the company is seeking regulatory actions by the government, particularly the F.C.C., which weighs a commitment to local communities and diversity when making its decision.

The F.C.C. case file on the merger with NBC includes at least 54 groups that Comcast has donated money to — including small entities like the [Centro de la Familia de Utah](#) and the [Elijah Cummings Youth Program in Israel](#) — that wrote letters to the agency in 2010 urging it to approve the transaction, or signed an agreement with Comcast endorsing it, according to a review of the file by The [Center for Public Integrity](#) and The New York Times. Comcast highlighted most of the letters [on its own website](#).



Launch media viewer

Comcast’s team includes six former government officials. From left, former Senator Don Nickles, former Representative Robert Walker, former Senator Blanche Lincoln, former Representative Ron Klink, David Cohen of Comcast and former F.C.C. member Meredith Attwell Baker. From left, Rogelio V. Solis/Associated Press; Steve Sisney/The Daily Oklahoman, via Associated Press; Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images; William B. Plowman/AP Images For NFIB; Paul Vathis/Associated Press; Larry Busacca/Getty Images For Women In Cable and Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

These groups received at least \$8.6 million from the Comcast Foundation over nearly a

decade through 2012, not including other donations from the corporation directly, the analysis found.

The correlation between giving and support for its deals extends to Congress: 91 of the 97 members of Congress who [signed a letter in 2011](#) supporting the Comcast NBC merger [received contributions](#) during that same election cycle from the company's political action committee or executives.

Mr. Cohen, in the interview, said it was not surprising that these groups were willing to speak up in favor of Comcast, as they in many cases have a longstanding relationship with the company and its employees.

But even one of Comcast's own lobbyists said in an interview that the relationship with some groups had a transactional flavor.

“If you have a company like Comcast that has been with them for a long time and continues to support them, they will go to bat for them,” the contract lobbyist for Comcast said, asking that he not be named because he was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly, “even if it means they have become pawns.”

Javier Palomarez, president of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, said the financial support his organization has received from Comcast is a tiny share of its overall budget. Support for the latest Comcast deal, he said, is based on his confidence in the company's commitment to diverse communities, and the benefits of the transaction.

So far, some members of Congress and other minority organizations that supported the NBC merger, including the [National Hispanic Leadership Agenda](#), have again praised Comcast's track record but withheld formally endorsing this new deal, saying they needed to study it more.

Craig Aaron, president of Free Press, a nonprofit group that is challenging the merger, said he was just waiting for the flood of letters of support to start, once Comcast files with the F.C.C. for the regulatory approval.

“They are the best in the business when it comes to pushing on all the levers in Washington to get done what they want,” he said. “I have to give them that.”

Correction: February 22, 2014

A picture on Friday with an article about Comcast's philanthropy and its clout in Washington was published in error. The photograph, part of a panel of portraits of people serving as lobbyists for Comcast, depicted former Representative Chip Pickering, Republican of Mississippi. Mr. Pickering is no longer registered as a lobbyist for Comcast, having left that role at the end of January.