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Wisconsin broadcast sports technicians given the cold shoulder by Sinclair Broadcasting Group

MILWAUKEE -- As Wisconsin-based sports technicians were headed into two of their busiest months in more than a decade, COVID-19 took hold of a nation. First the NBA came to an abrupt halt after one of its players tested positive for coronavirus. Other sports followed.

That means there are a lot of people out of work. Aside from the players that fans see on their TV screens, there are more than 50 people that produce each market's sports broadcasts. These are people who are not on salary and are paid per event. No games, no pay.

While networks including FOX Sports, Turner Sports and CBS committed to paying production crews hired through the NCAA basketball tournaments and four PGA events, [Sinclair Broadcast Group](#), which purchased FOX Sports Wisconsin among other regional sports networks (RSNs) in August of 2019, has not offered meaningful compensation to its now unemployed workers.

Sinclair, a multi-billion-dollar company and according to its own website, "one of the largest and most diversified television broadcast companies in the country," released via newswire earlier this week that it would offer a \$2,500 "interest-free advance" to qualifying technicians.

"We refuse to believe this is the best it can do, said Leslie Fitzsimmons, IATSE Local 414 vice president. "Sinclair reported an 80-plus percent year-over-year increase (fourth quarter 2018 to 2019), "Sinclair's CEO made \$7.5 million last year. We've lost all of our income. We need help. Not only that, we are losing out on our health contributions, which puts our ability to maintain coverage at risk. It's a double whammy."

Locally, technicians say they don't know what a "salary advance" entails because the company has not communicated with the workers or their leadership.

"Sinclair's lack of communication with the workforce is a major contributor to the anxiety amongst the crew," Will Tinsley, President, IATSE Local 414, said. "And after all, why would we want to be in debt to an employer that won't speak with us directly?"

Wisconsin Broadcast Sports Technicians have been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 crises after February, a month during which the Bucks played mostly away from Fiserv Forum.

"Workers understand that for Sinclair to pay for games that have only been postponed and not officially cancelled could be an expensive bill," Erik West, IATSE 414 business agent, said. "However, FSWisconsin has been re-airing previously-played games and promoting those re-airings. That means that FSWisconsin, which continues to collect subscribers' fees from cable companies, can put sports on their networks without having to pay for production in this case. That's a nice chunk of revenue – and we get offered a loan."

Other broadcasters seem to be responding differently.

"We've heard there has been some movement from NBC in one of its markets and hope that response will extend to the remaining NBC RSNs, AT&T / Warner media has just set up a \$100 million fund for 'production crews' and we hope that includes sports broadcast technicians but we haven't heard yet," West said.

Some professional sports teams in other markets have agreed to pay their regional TV production crews for canceled games. So far, that does not include the Milwaukee Bucks or Milwaukee Brewers organizations.

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