

DIGITAL MUST CARRY

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Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554

In the Matter of
Carriage of the Transmissions
Of Digital Television Broadcast Stations
Amendments to Part 76
of the Commission's Rules

CS Docket No. 98-120

THIS DATE
CANCELLED
F.C.C.
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

COMMENTS OF

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6 October, 1998

I file these comments on October 6, 1998, in the FCC's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on the Carriage of Transmissions of Digital Television Broadcast Stations adopted July 9, 1998, CS Docket No. 98-120.

I would like to take this opportunity to comment on proceedings of the Federal Communications Commission regarding the issue of Digital Must Carry (Proposed Rulemaking on the Carriage of Transmissions of Digital Television Broadcast Stations adopted July 9, 1998, CS Docket No. 98-120). Although my knowledge on this issue is somewhat limited, I believe I've done sufficient research to make an intelligent statement on the repercussions that a must carry decision would have on me both personally and professionally. I write you as a citizen and a teacher. I begin my comments with this statement for a reason. Not long after I became aware of this issue the complications of requiring cable companies to carry redundant programming through different broadcast signals became obvious to me. I will dispense with the detail and state simply as I understand the situation. In order to carry both analog and digital signals of local broadcasting, cable companies must make decisions that could result in a reduction of current programming. My particular interest in this issue concerns a specific network. The inspiration for my investigation has been my concern over the impact this ruling will have on this network. In particular I will be referring to C-SPAN, the Cable-Satellite Public Access Network. Because I respect the committee's integrity and responsibility in making an informed decision I feel compelled to illustrate the powerful tools C-SPAN brings to public education. The loss of these resources would be a tragedy.

Teaching the social studies is both an incredibly important and difficult undertaking. The concepts of life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness may read eloquently on paper, but the significance of these words, representing the very foundations of our society, are extraordinarily abstract terms to high school students. Through C-SPAN's mission, as expressed in its various networks and programming, both teachers and learners have access to the resources that bring relevance to these concepts. The very fact that government processes are made accessible to the public through this unique network makes it an incredibly valuable tool in both education and democracy. The importance of maintaining an educated electorate has never been more obvious as it is today. Polls and sound bites have seemingly replaced hard debate on subjects so very important. At a time when educators are challenged to raise the standards by which we will judge our student's competencies; valued resources must be held as prized possessions. In many ways C-SPAN's existence can be compared to the mission of civic education. If our government is to remain healthy the

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public must not only have access to its proceedings but must also understand the processes through which it functions. Let me relate to you how C-SPAN has significantly impacted my student's understanding of these processes.

Early in 1995 I began to use C-SPAN resources in my American history and government classes. At that time I realized the value of real-time access to governmental proceedings. My students were learning about the legislative process through a textbook. Flow charts and lecture notes served to provide an academic comprehension but no real appreciation for the intricacies and power of the democratic process. The introduction of C-SPAN resources not only provided a more dynamic learning environment, it also served as a catalyst, promoting interest among students who were in the past only marginally successful. From that semester until the present-day our school has relied on the valuable tools provided to us through this network. In 1996, a presidential election year, C-SPAN produced *The Road to the White House*. This program provided my students the opportunity to follow a presidential election as if they were reporters in a press pool. We created a program using our emerging Internet connectivity that allowed our students to truly be engaged in the study of a presidential election.

On May 23, 1997, I began an application of C-SPAN's Democracy in America project with several teachers from various departments at my school. I named this project, *Tocqueville at Mandarin*. As the project's coordinator, I developed lesson plans and special projects with courses ranging from Geometry I to A.P. French. Mandarin High School used C-SPAN's Tocqueville programming and created an archive for future use. Our American History students worked closely with A. P. French students and developed an ongoing dialogue with students in Nantes, France utilizing the CuSeeme/ Connectix video conferencing program developed as part of the Global Links project. Courses in Law Studies and Sociology used the Tocqueville vignettes dealing with the making, enforcing, and judging of laws. The repercussion of social deviance was explored with the help of inmates in New York's Sing Sing prison. The text of Tocqueville's book, *Democracy in America*, was available via the Tocqueville website (C-SPAN's extensive website has been an additional resource to teachers) and was used in Language Arts and Social Studies classes. Students in our World Religions class used the video segments of the Bus Tour that addressed America's 19th century religious awakening. The school's government classes regularly tuned in to *Washington Journal* and heard their fellow classmates ask questions during the program's call-in segment.

Programs like the Tocqueville at Mandarin project do not happen by chance. The combined resources and efforts of C-SPAN's education outreach program, C-SPAN in the Classroom, provides opportunities like this for teachers year-round. In the fall of this year C-SPAN2 launched an entirely new type of programming. Book TV on C-SPAN2 provides the most extensive book programming on television today. Focusing on nonfiction, this network within a network, presents author's interviews, library and bookstore tours, and publishing industry events around the country all weekend, every weekend. This timely undertaking by C-SPAN reinforces efforts being made by schools and universities across the nation to improve student interest and performance in reading. Teachers have precious few allies in this effort. Book TV segments have enabled our students to observe authors interact with their readers and peers; visit unique bookstores, libraries and private collections; witness group discussions of nonfiction books; and attended publishing events. Our students are encouraged to participate in discussions on books about history, politics and culture. This type of programming is an important tool if America's schools are to achieve the education goals of the 21st century. This type of programming does not happen on other networks.

In the coming months my students will begin the investigation of electoral process which will ultimately lead to the selection of our president in the year 2000. Through C-SPAN programming my students will take an active part in the electoral process. There are resources available outside of this network. I challenged any member of the commission to take a moment and compare C-SPAN's coverage of the United States House of Representatives, Senate, and executive branch with that of the major news services.

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In order to teach our students to be effectively engaged in the processes of government, we must teach them to be critical viewers of the media. C-SPAN's mission statement provides schools throughout our country with the assurance that their coverage of events is objective and fair. Schools must have access to this type of resource.

Members of the Federal Communications Commission, if as a result of the digital must carrying issue cable companies are forced to replace C-SPAN programming with a local broadcast station's digital signal many of the successful programs I've described above will be discontinued or severely curtailed. I'm one teacher at one school. I reminded members that across our nation teachers are participating in growing numbers in C-SPAN's successful education outreach program, C-SPAN in the Classroom. Each year hundreds of thousands of students are exposed to the significant resources of this network. The hardship created by replacement or reduction of this programming is real. Please consider my remarks while discussing the future of the digital must carry issue.

Submitted by:



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