

The consolidation of giant cable companies must stop. Their increasing control over the cable industry amounts to a monopoly which chokes competition and fails to serve the public interest.

The concentration of power and control over distribution of media is a growing concern. Consumers end up paying more for less.

Alternative services become rare and in many cases impossible.

If Comcast and Time Warner are allowed to merge with Adelphia, the two companies will control nearly 50 percent of the national market.

This level of concentration in the cable industry will lead to higher consumer rates and lower quality service.

Since passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and the “deregulation” of cable, consumers have seen their rates jump an average of 59 percent — with some areas experiencing even more dramatic increases. Currently the cable TV situation is such that we subscribe to satellite services. We receive far more stations than our cable provider, Adelphia, can provide for the same cost.

We are required to buy channels we don't want or need because the cable operators bundle them together. The quality of customer service often reflects the fact that cable television is not a competitive market.

Meanwhile, the cost of cable modem

service remains out of reach for many households, holding constant for years and selectively underserving rural and low-income Americans. My neighborhood is one such example. We have Adelphia cable modem service for \$56/month. There is no DSL alternative through our phone company (we are too far from the main office) and no other cable option. Our choices are dial-up or Adelphia cable modem.

Compare this with the United Kingdom, where we lived for several years. British Telecom, who own the phone lines in that country, dragged its feet until they were forced by government regulators to 1) roll out ADSL access to ALL its customers, rural or otherwise, and 2) resell use of its

lines to other ADSL providers at fair rates. In the few years since this occurred, competition in UK's hi-speed internet access has grown and prices have dropped — in many cases far below costs here in the US — making it possible for even low income families to use ADSL services.

Meanwhile the American people are watching the digital divide widen even as the need for access to high-speed networks increases.

Cable companies have become less responsive to the needs and requirements of communities. The quality of public accountability in local franchise agreements has declined, as big companies leverage their power to squeeze local

governments.

In many communities, the truly independent sources of local news, information and culture come from the public channels produced at the local access centers.

Unfortunately, local channels lack the resources to produce the programming that citizens want and need.

The last thing we need is to reward the anti-competitive actions of cable giants by permitting greater consolidation in ownership, reducing competition, and encouraging more of the same.