

The "deregulation" of cable television has resulted in cable tv rate increases. Reason rate changes announced in fine print on bill insert just last month require senior citizens to know they get a discount in order to request it. It is not advertised. It is not in bold print. A cable installer is not authorized to suggest it is available at time of installation. Using cable internet is not available or accessible to all: limited by cost or understanding. In the matter of new video competition is entering the market, please consider that a vast majority of customers do not understand the technological differences that get video to their homes. They will try to find an affordable option that as features that they desire and understand. As a household word - franchising has relevance to donut shops, french fries and subway sandwiches not who gets to dig up the streets or climb the polls along them. In this regard they rely on public policy and local government to represent thier interests.

Maybe the franchising process needs reform? It is adversarial, long and pits big business against community volunteers or small towns against big business. The most important issue is how to ensure that the rights and services of local communities are protected and enriched. Local governments undoubtedly will -- and must -- play a key role in any future franchising process.

The imperfect franchising process has been a critical safeguard to protect the interests of consumers and citizens in our local communities. Now that the phone companies are building television systems, local communities are hungry for new competition that could drive down costs, increase options, provide access to local content and bring us closer to bridging the digital divide.

In this opportunity to expand competition lets not loose the publics rights.

As new franchising rules are considered, and new market realities taken into account do not cut local communities out of the process. They must be allowed to lend their voice to how new video and broadband systems will be implemented and what features will be available to meet future needs.