

I believe that local communities, including rural communities like the one where my parents live, have a right to affordable and independent cable television service, which has been adversely affected already by the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and the "deregulation" of cable television. . The FCC, through this Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, recognizes that new video competition is entering the market, as phone companies (like AT&T and Verizon) begin to roll out television service. The Commission asks if the telephone companies are slowed or blocked in their expansion by the process of negotiating franchises -- the agreements that companies seeking to provide video services sign with local governments that set the terms for building cable television systems.

Like any bureaucratic process, franchising may not be perfect, but this is not excuse to execute changes that favor telephone companies over local communities. Any changes in the franchising process should rather ensure that it remains a key safeguard to protect the interests of local consumers and citizens and allow local governments to control rights-of-way and obtain fair rents and equal service for different socioeconomic areas from the companies that are allowed access to lay cable. Franchise agreements should guarantee funding and facilities to provide public access television and low-cost broadband for community schools and libraries.

I view consolidation of the media as a dangerous threat to our democracy and quality of life, particularly because of the threat to local independent programming. I personally will not buy cable services if I am required to buy unnecessary channels bundled together by cable operators.

Let me emphasize that in exchange for digging up our communities, these communities have the right to local news, information and culture from the public channels produced at community media centers. This allows citizens of our democracy to see our local governments in action and to learn about events happening close to home. Some towns have obtained wired schools and libraries, resources for e-medicine, government efficiency programs and other educational initiatives. Towns must have negotiating power to ensure the entire community is served. Large corporations will not do this.