

Since passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and the "deregulation" of cable television, consumers have seen their rates jump an average of 59 percent -- with some areas experiencing even more dramatic increases. 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. The American people are watching the digital divide widen even as the need for access to high-speed networks increases.

These franchise agreements guarantee that local governments control rights-of-way and obtain fair rents from the companies that dig them up to lay cable. They guarantee universal build-out of the technology and its advantages to every household in the community, not just affluent neighborhoods. They guarantee funding and facilities to provide public access television as well as other services like low-cost broadband for our schools and libraries.

However, no matter the level at which 'franchises' to new providers are granted -- local, state, or national -- local communities cannot be cut 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.

The Air waves belong to us all!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!1