

***Giving Parents the Power of Choice***  
***Remarks to the KidVid Summit***  
*Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate*  
*June 7, 2006*

Thank you.

It's a pleasure to be here with all of you – many of whom I met in one of my first meetings when you presented the FCC with a settlement regarding children's television.

It's also an honor to stand here today with such distinguished speakers, all of whom have done noble things for children across our great country.

However, all of them have also spent a great deal of time inside Washington. In Washington when we talk about communications issues we use complex acronyms and words like “net neutrality” and “a la carte” – all things loaded with meaning here. But in most of the rest of America, a la carte does not call to mind cable television – it's how you order at a restaurant.

For this particular discussion to have meaning – to reach the people it needs to reach – we need to be talking in terms parents understand. Educational television. Children's television. Parental control. More choices.

That's why I'm glad to have the opportunity to be here today.

As a parent, I am always amazed when content providers and broadcasters claim that they didn't think a particular program was indecent. Because ordinary Americans seem to have a pretty good handle on what indecency is in their local communities across the United States.

Most parents know when something that is shown on television is unacceptable or indecent. Most parents know when they wish that their children hadn't seen or heard something. Most parents know when their children's innocence has been marred by explicit scenes of sex or violence on television. And most parents wish there were more options, more choices, more positive, inspiring, and educational programming for their families.

I know this not just as a parent myself but because of the countless numbers of parents have told us that they know. They file hundreds of thousands of complaints with the FCC in a given year. They stop me grocery shopping, working out at the gym, at Sunday School – and they all have the same message, “Debi – you've got to do something about what's on TV.”

Well, I can't do it alone.

Parents can't do it alone. Broadcasters can't do it alone. Cable providers can't do it alone. Even government can't do it alone. Making television a positive force in our children's lives is going to take all of us. Senator Clinton famously suggested that it takes more than just a parent to raise a child, it takes a village. I'd suggest that it takes more than a village to positively influence our children – it takes a society. A society dedicated to the idea that our children's minds are our most vital national resource. We must all work together to shape those minds.

There is no silver bullet.

A la carte – which I think we should call “channel on demand” because it would make more sense to parents outside the Beltway – has just become a lobbying game in Washington. We need to stop just throwing the phrase around and start having a real discussion about what it is – the right for every American to be able to choose what comes into their home.

I'm sure we have all shopped at online booksellers. We go to the website, browse around, pick a children's book and have it shipped to our homes. Imagine if instead when we used these online sellers, we paid \$100 a month and they shipped us 10 books of their choosing – horror stories, violent thrillers, and pornography. Sure, we get the children's book we want and we can throw away the 9 other books but we still have to PAY for those books.

Online booksellers don't do that because there are bookstores on every corner – they have competition. But once again, it's easy to forget in Washington that in many parts of the country – like Alaska or some parts of Tennessee – you don't have many options when it comes to who sells you your television programming.

This is what the channel on demand debate is all about – choosing what you want and only paying for what you choose.

Channel on demand is about choice. It's about allowing each family to choose what they want to watch. It's about creating a business model that serves customers as well as cable companies. It's about telling parents to take responsibility, and then giving them the chance to actually take that responsibility.

Ten years ago, cable companies just sold television. Now they sell broadband Internet, telephone service, AND television. They are in the process of changing their business model to accommodate those new products so why not change it to accommodate consumers as well?

The mobile phone industry has adapted well to new business models. Some mobile phones are almost free and some are very expensive. Some people subscribe to huge plans with thousands of minutes and some people buy a prepaid phone with only a couple hundred minutes. Some phones are very basic and some phones have bells and whistles –

Internet, cameras, and now even video. Consumers have choices and as a result mobile phones are in almost every pocket in the country.

But as I said before, channel on demand is not the silver bullet. And the federal government should not be relied on as the only thing that can change television for the better. Families need to be part of the solution and start asking questions. They need to start demanding more from broadcasters, advertisers, producers, cable and satellite providers, and their government. Questions like what parental controls are available, how we can encourage the production of more quality children's programming, and how we can make our children more media literate.

Now, I have been given an opportunity to serve as a voice for parents. It's a role I take very seriously. I intend to be out there asking these questions, and if you have an answer I want to hear from you. It will take all of us as a society to make a difference. A society dedicated to the idea that our children's minds are our most vital national resource.