

Remarks by FCC Chairman Kevin J. Martin
“Providing More Tools for Parents”

U.S. Capitol, June 14, 2007

Thank you, Congressman Lipinski and Congressman Fortenberry, for your hard work and leadership on this issue. And thank you, Congressman Shuler and Congressman Aderholt, for your efforts. As you can see from the group assembled here today, helping families navigate today’s television world is a bipartisan issue.

Television today offers viewers an extraordinary variety of programming on numerous channels. Today, networks offer some of the best, most original and diverse programming ever produced. They also offer, however, some of the coarsest programming ever produced.

Parents must have the tools to help their children take advantage of the good television can offer, while enabling them to limit their children’s exposure to violent and sexual content they believe is inappropriate. Since my arrival at the Commission, I have been urging the industry to provide parents with the tools to choose the kinds of programs they want to enter their homes.

In 2003, I challenged cable and satellite operators to make family-friendly programming packages available and offer networks in a more a la carte manner.
http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-234613A1.doc

Cable and satellite operators carry a significant amount of high-quality family friendly programming including the Disney Channel, Discovery and the ABC Family Channel, but parents should not have to buy channels with programs rated TV-MA (Mature) to get these channels.

So far, the industry has not responded in a meaningful way.

Moreover, offering channels in a more a la carte fashion will benefit all consumers—not only parents. All subscribers know that cable prices have risen at astounding rates—just as other communications costs have fallen.

In the last ten years, cable prices have doubled. A la carte pricing not only gives parents greater control over the content available to their families, but also has the potential to lower prices for consumers across the board.

Americans deserve greater control over content and their cable bills. Our message today is very simple: no consumer should have to pay for content they do not wish to receive. Period.

Your efforts today are even more important in the wake of the Second Circuit Court’s recent decision which may make it more difficult for the FCC to enforce restrictions on objectionable language broadcast over the public airwaves. We need a content-neutral solution that puts power in the hands of America’s parents and avoids first amendment concerns. As I have said before, there is a right to free speech, but there is no constitutional right to be paid for speech.

While it may surprise some, I actually agree with many critics of the FCC that parents—not the government—should be the first and last line of defense. Parents are best able to determine what programming their children should be exposed to.

But that means that parents must have meaningful choices and that their choices must have meaningful consequences. If a family must continue to pay for programming even when they object to it, there is little or no incentive for programmers to respond. Instead there should be marketplace implications for programmers when consumers don't want a channel.

Television today is an extraordinary medium, offering an enormous variety of programming including some excellent content. The viewing picture nevertheless leaves something to be desired by consumers. Today we are taking a giant step towards meeting their needs by providing them with meaningful choice and true control over the programming coming into their homes.

Thank you for your invitation to be with you here.

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