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May 22, 2015

The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20536

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Dear Chairman Wheeler:

I write to express my concerns about the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) recent proposal for implementing Section 111 of the STELA Reauthorization Act of 2014 (STELAR). For my home state of Colorado, this proposal could lead to higher prices for cable television service, especially for basic cable customers in our rural markets. It may also lead to fewer video programming choices for lower-income Coloradans.

Section 111 of STELAR requires the FCC to streamline the petition process for small cable operators to seek an exemption from certain regulations. The small operators must demonstrate that they operate in markets where sufficient competition ensures reasonable rates and meaningful choice of programming. Congress's intent was to reduce the burden on small cable providers that often have fewer resources to undertake the petition process. However, the FCC's proposal to eliminate its presumption of "no effective competition" may benefit large cable companies.

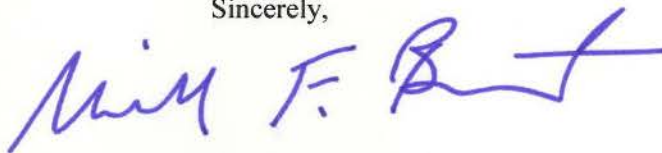
Presuming that effective competition for video programming exists in every community could remove a local franchising authority's ability to regulate the service rates charged by all cable companies, large and small. It may also eliminate the requirement to maintain basic cable service for all consumers. This could lead to fewer programming options if large cable operators remove less profitable local stations and public, educational, and governmental access (PEG) channels from the basic cable service tier.

Colorado has more than 500 distinct cable communities. Less than half have been deemed by the FCC to be effectively competitive for pay television services and many of these communities rely on the basic tier of service. The FCC's proposal could have a negative effect on these communities that rely on the basic tier for critical local news and educational broadcasts.

I ask the FCC to reconsider its proposal and make only those changes directed by Congress in Section 111 of STELAR. I have long advocated for the need of local, in-state programming for the Four Corners region of our state. The FCC's proposal could undermine those efforts and risk removal of far more local programming to higher, more expensive tiers.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
U.S. Senator