

(July 26, 2006) Multi-Choice Cable Content Bill Proposed

Multiple-Choice Cable Content Bill Planned

By John Eggerton -- Broadcasting & Cable, 7/26/2006 3:20:00 PM

<http://www.broadcastingcable.com/article/CA6356426.html>

Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-Ill.) and Tom Osborne (R-Neb.) are introducing a bill that would try to control cable content by giving the industry a choice among three regulatory approaches.

According to a top Lipinski staffer, The bill, The Family Choice Act of 2006, would require multichannel video providers to choose one of three options: 1) apply FCC broadcast indecency standards to their own programming, currently free of FCC indecency oversight; 2) offer an opt-out form of a la carte so subscribers could choose not to take certain channels; or 3) offer a family-friendly tier that meets the definition supplied in the bill but not supplied to this reporter..

They will introduce the bill the same day--July 27--that the Senate is being briefed on a new \$300 million content-control campaign from the TV industry, an effort meant, in part, to head off calls for mandated à la carte cable, but representatives for both legislators say the timing was coincidence.

Parents Television Council President, Brent Bozell, a fan of a la carte, will join the legislators for the announcement.

A bill, introduced by frequent cable critic Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.) that would have effectively forced a la carte--making expediting cable franchising contingent on it--was defeated overwhelmingly as an amendment to a Senate telecom reform bill awaiting a floor vote.

"In today's culture, young children are faced with a barrage of inappropriate images and messages coming into our homes," Lipinski said in a PTC release promoting the bill. "We need to help parents by giving them meaningful ways to protect their children from indecent programming, and this bill will do that."

The likelihood of such a bill passing remain slim to none, particularly given the bipartisan 20-2 defeat of the McCain bill in the Senate Commerce Committee.

Cable argues that a la carte runs roughshod over its business model, likening it to forcing a newspaper to sell the sports or business sections individually, or breaking out the anchor store from a mall whose niche stores depend on it for their traffic and survival. The argument has resonated with some Democrats.