



# Family Concerns

"Bridging the Information Gap"

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## Cable Choice

*Giving families choice between smut and good programming*

Watching television these days is like venturing out into a minefield blindfolded; one never knows when a seemingly innocent sitcom can turn into a veritable sewer of innuendo, double entendre and explicit scenes that would make anyone blush. Violence and perversion invade our homes and threaten to desensitize us nightly. While watching a mystery the other night, the plot took a sudden twist, and I was thrust into what I can only describe as propaganda to convince me that homosexuality is a valid alternative lifestyle; that it can even be preferable. The surprise homosexual characters were portrayed in a way that was sympathetic to their lifestyle and those who were concerned about that lifestyle as ignorant and bigoted. There was no way to predict the plot would take that sudden turn into the darkness of a lifestyle that is anything but healthy and normal. I had the option of shutting the TV off or changing the channel, but often certain cable channels are so filled with objectionable material it is impossible to filter it completely out of our homes.

### **Cable Choice: the choice that protects your family**

Cable choice is an issue that CWA has been actively promoting for several years. Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-Illinois) recently reintroduced the Family and Consumer Choice Act (**H.R. 2738**) into the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress to give parents and families the choices they deserve in cable programming. This bill would allow cable companies to choose one of three options: a) abide by broadcast regulations standards and not transmit any material that is indecent or profane on any channel within its "premium" cable package between 6:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m.; b) fully scramble or block without charge, the audio and video programming on any channel that a subscriber does not wish to receive in "a la carte" pricing, or c) allow a subscriber to subscribe to a family tier of programming. A "family tier" is defined in the bill as containing all channels offered within a "premium" package but not including those channels which carry programs that are rated TV-14 or TV-Mature during prime viewing time. The only exception would be news programs and live sporting events.

### **Irresponsible and arrogant**

CWA President Wendy Wright spoke to this issue at a news conference given by Rep. Lipinski. She stated, "Cable choice is a solution to give parents control over what their children see and hear on television. Television programmers steal children's innocence in their drive to the bottom to outdo each other in violence and profanity and are doing so in such a way that it is nearly impossible to avoid. Their irresponsible and arrogant behavior in the face of protests from consumers is an invitation for this legislation to protect children and families."

### **V-Chip**

In response to the outrage that parents have expressed to the industry, the cable industry has offered program ratings and technology such as the V-Chip for parents to block the unwanted programming. The industry has spent more than \$550 million in an education campaign on how to use the V-Chip; however, recent studies done by the Parents Television Council (PTC) and Zogby shows that parents are still confused on how to use the technology. In addition, the shows are arbitrarily rated by the industry; the ratings do nothing to block objectionable programming.

### **V-Chip does not do it all**

Even if the V-Chip were simple to use and worked every time, consumers are still forced to pay for programming they do not want. The average home watches only 17 channels it receives on the "premium" cable package. According to an independent study commissioned by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), American consumers could lower their monthly cable bill by as much as 13 percent if they had an "a la carte" option.

### **The public wants options**

In an era in which everyone wants "choices," the cable industry is denying its consumers the option of receiving only the channels they want to receive. The cable industry continues to hold a monopoly over programming. They are holding their consumers' hostage, forcing Americans to subsidize vulgar and violent television shows that are not appropriate for children and not good for society or community standards.

### **Cable industry ignores the public's wishes**

The ability to block channels through technology is not fully developed, and it is unreliable. Almost half of the 280,000,000 televisions in the United States do not possess the capability to block programming. The cable industry has repeatedly ignored pleas to clean up its own industry; in fact, shows containing nudity, perverse sexual acts and violence are on the increase. The pleas of customers to only pay for what they want coming into their homes have fallen on deaf ears.

### **Action:**

CWA's 535 lobbyists visited many Congressional offices in July regarding this issue. Congress is in recess right now; however, it is important that we reinforce their efforts by contacting our representatives at their home offices or in town hall meetings. Urge them to co-sponsor and support **H.R. 2738**, the Family and Consumer Choice Act. Call them at their local offices while they are in recess or call the Capitol House switchboard at 202-335-3121 when they return.