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NEWS RELEASE

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Rep. John D. Dingell, Chairman

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Committee Leaders Applaud Michigan Court Decision to Block Comcast Public Programming Proposal Hearing Scheduled on Availability of Public, Educational Channels on Cable

Washington, D.C. — Leaders of the Committee on Energy and Commerce today applauded a decision made yesterday by a Michigan court to block a Comcast proposal to require some Michigan residents to obtain converter boxes to access Public, Educational and Government (PEG) programming. Comcast announced its new plan in November and planned to implement it today.

“I commend the court’s decision to block Comcast’s plan to provide PEG channels in a digital format only. This proposal would have forced many Michigan consumers to pay additional fees to rent set-top boxes to receive the high-quality educational programming they are currently guaranteed with basic cable service,” said Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI), Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce. “I commend the Mayor of Dearborn, John O’Reilly, for his leadership on this issue. The Committee on Energy and Commerce will be examining this matter thoroughly in coming weeks.”

The Communications Act requires that cable operators offer local broadcast stations and PEG channels, to the extent required by the franchise authority, on the cable operator's basic service tier. However, in recent weeks, Comcast has announced plans to convert analog PEG channels to digital format, which would require many viewers to pay to rent set-top boxes in addition to the cost for basic cable service in order to continue to receive PEG programming on all of their television sets.

"I am concerned that cable consumers are encountering barriers to receiving their public, education and government access channels," said Rep. Bart Stupak (D-MI), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. "PEG channels serve an essential role in local communities and I was pleased to see the court block an effort to make these channels available only to digital cable subscribers. As media consolidation continues to increase, PEG channels become even more vital in providing a much needed local voice and diversity of opinion. The committee must make it clear to cable companies that we are serious about protecting access to PEG channel programming."

"PEG services play an important role in promoting localism and diversity in national media policy. They provide vital and vibrant services in communities around the nation and foster civic access and involvement in the best traditions of our democracy," said Rep. Ed Markey (D-MA), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet.

Dingell announced yesterday that the Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet will hold a January 29, 2008, hearing to explore the provision of public, educational and government (PEG) programming by video programming providers. While witnesses for the hearing will be announced at a future date, the Committee will likely invite representatives from industry and local government as well as those involved with the provision of PEG programming.

Chairman Dingell originally challenged Comcast's proposal in a December 21 letter.

December 21, 2007 letter

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Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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