

Chairman Dingell at the Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet hearing entitled, "Public Education, and Governmental (PEG) Services in the Digital TV Age"

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND THE INTERNET HEARING ENTITLED, "PUBLIC EDUCATION, AND GOVERNMENTAL (PEG) SERVICES IN THE DIGITAL TV AGE"
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Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this very important hearing. Let me begin by welcoming several friends here today, including my dear friend Mayor Oâ€™Reilly of Dearborn, Michigan. Thank you for your time and efforts to participate in todayâ€™s hearing.

The Committee will hear testimony today concerning the current treatment of Public, Educational, and Governmental or PEG programming by video programming providers. Local communities use PEG programming to cover town meetings and air educational programs and even to cover local high school sports events. This programming constitutes a crucial aspect of political discourse in communities across America and promotes the important goals of localism and diversity.

The Committee recently learned that some providers are changing how consumers receive PEG programming. In some cases, these changes could impose additional costs on consumers or make it more difficult for them to locate PEG programming. In other instances, the changes may prevent consumers from digitally recording PEG programming. These are matters of grave concern.

Let me be clear I am opposed to any effort that would thwart the goals underlying a cable operatorâ€™s obligation to make PEG programming available to consumers. It matters little to me if such efforts are driven by technological change, the need for more network capacity, or the desire to compete with new entrants. PEG programming deserves first-class treatment, not second-class billing. That is why Congress requires cable operators to provide PEG programming on the most basic tier of service and why this Committee has stated that it should be available to subscribers at the lowest reasonable rate.

I am pleased that Comcast, which had announced changes detrimental to the way it delivers PEG services in Michigan, has agreed to make a good faith effort to work out a settlement with affected communities. I am optimistic that these discussions will lead to a result that leaves all parties better off.

I recognize that all types of communications networks are being upgraded with the latest technologies. These upgrades often require Congress to consider how existing policy priorities will be accommodated by the new networks of the future. This Committee has examined such issues closely in the past, and I look forward to doing so now for PEG services.

I thank you for this time and look forward to the testimony of todayâ€™s distinguished witnesses.

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