



May 11, 2004

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, I would like to express our concerns about access to relevant cable programs for Asian Pacific Americans and other minorities, particularly those who are limited English proficient and depend upon broadcasts in their native language for news and entertainment.

We have become aware of legislation that would force cable and satellite operators to sell each channel they offer individually – the so-called “a la carte” proposal. We strongly oppose that proposal. It would adversely affect the ability of our community to freely express themselves through valuable cultural programs that draw on our collective heritage, and promote the visual and dramatic arts, film, theater, literature, music. For example, in places such as Los Angeles County, over forty percent of the Asian households speak English less than very well. Without programming, particularly news programs, in language, these households would be further isolated.

The business model of smaller ethnically or culturally targeted networks, like that of most networks, requires that their service be available in the largest possible number of television homes. It is critical for the future of our community that as many Asian Pacific Americans as possible have access to this type of programming at reasonable rates.

Having national cable and satellite operators as a bundled service allows ethnic, diverse broadcasters to keep down the fees they charge the cable or satellite operator for their service. However, if they had to depend on each cable or satellite household making an independent decision on whether to subscribe to a specific channel, marketing costs would skyrocket, advertising rates could plummet (because of limited potential reach), and the fees charged to cable and satellite operators would increase dramatically (to offset the advertising loss), and the price the cable and satellite operators charge customers for these smaller targeted channels would have to be several dollars a month. The very existence of culturally or ethnically targeted programming would be jeopardized.

An “a la carte” system would kill newer minority owned channels by locking in the head start incumbent channels enjoy. Since many of the incumbent channels are owned by extremely large media corporations able to subsidize launches of new programs and channels through advertising on the network and cable channels they already own.

We ask you to actively oppose any such proposal that may be placed before the Commerce Committee.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Karen K. Narasaki
President and Executive Director

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