

Save Grassroots Democracy: Save Community Access TV

**An OpEdNews.com Article, a Blog Entry in Comments From Left Field,
And the Subject of a Public Issues Campaign and Guest-Appearance on NewsRap**

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"P.E.G." stands for "Public, Educational, and Governmental" TV—Community Access Television—and that stands for us all!

But like just about anything else even slightly "progressive" these days—and there is nothing more progressive, or quintessentially American, than giving everyday citizens access to television, arguably the most powerful means of communication ever devised—Community Access TV is under attack, its very existence now threatened by powerful interests in the nearly trillion-dollar-a-year telecommunications industry.

But PEG has an ally even more powerful than the most multi-national of corporations: the public at large.

Don't let 'em fool you: The real power over the airwaves ultimately lies not with the media moguls, as they'd have us believe, but with us in the public at large. Nobody can sell us a nickel's worth of goods, or a TV program advertising them, unless we let them. We're not just sheep to be led, all too often to the slaughter; we're human beings who can think and do much as we please.

The only way the powers-that-be can impose their will upon the rest of us is with raw, brute force (and thank God that for most of us that has yet to happen) or with brutally effective psychological propaganda.

And that, of course, is where the mass media comes in. The most important commodity in the 21st Century—the thing that can set our minds (and thus the rest of us) free, or enslave us if we don't pay enough attention—is information.

Although information has always been key to the advancement of our most intelligent of species, this has truly become the Information Age, not only because of our incredible technology but also because, freed by that technology, countless ideas are associating with countless other ideas from around the world and creating still other ideas, in an explosion, an orgy, a blossoming of unpredictably diverse, wonderfully human thought, feeling, and expression.

And that's why the future of Community Access TV—giving face and voice to the creative minds and spirits of truly individual individuals and communities, as does the Internet (into which CAT productions are often webstreamed)—is

more important than ever to safeguard and nurture.

Do we really want to live in a world without Community Access TV, of "one size fits all" television?

I doubt we do. [Surveys have shown](http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=120) [http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=120] that half of the subscribers to cable TV have watched at least one community access program in the previous two weeks: That's tens of millions of viewers, week after week. For some of us, the admittedly low-budget productions are something of a "guilty pleasure"—the shows will never have the technical sophistication of a network production—then again, no network "reality show" will ever have the reality and humanity, warts and all, of a truly homegrown production on Community Access TV.

But three—count 'em, three—bills in the Congress threaten to put an end to this contemporary form of grassroots democracy. Backed by the powerful telecommunications lobby, which has donated millions to politicians of both major parties, House Bill 3146 and Senate Bills 1349 and 1504 (the latter, most famous, sponsored by John McCain and John Ensign), would streamline negotiations and lower operating costs for the telecom industry by abolishing cable franchises with individual municipalities all across the nation.

The results would include not only cutting off financial support and access to the cable television system for PEG programs—produced freely by members of the public, educational

institutions, and local bodies of government—as well as I-net communications—between local institutions (as for emergency services!)—but also most likely infringing on local governments' rights of way (that which the taxpayers provide and the cable companies pay now to use, in accordance with local regulations), allowing large areas to go without cable service, and allowing "redlining" or other forms of discrimination—service could be denied based on such factors as race, ethnicity, or sex.

For more thorough analyses of these terribly flawed bills, now working their ways through Congressional committees, read [here](http://www.cctvcambridge.org/node/129) [http://www.cctvcambridge.org/node/129], [here](http://www.alliancecm.org/) [http://www.alliancecm.org/], and especially [here](http://www.varnumlaw.com/services/cable/telephone_entry.php) [http://www.varnumlaw.com/services/cable/telephone_entry.php].

And you will find in each of those excellent links sample letters with which to contact your senators and congressional representative. Don't let the only voices they hear be those of the well-paid lobbyists of the telecom industry. Let your legislators know that they must ultimately answer to the people!

Let them know that "one size does not fit all" when it comes to community programming and to regulation of cable companies and our rights of way in the wonderfully diverse towns and cities that we call home. Let them know that public, educational, and governmental TV—Community Access TV—provides real value to our communities that cannot be replaced by any national programming.

As you may read in the links above, community access stations across the country are coordinating their efforts to mobilize their viewers and speak out with one voice: Save our Community Access TV!

And to help you help in this campaign—to help you help your own community—below is provided, through the good services of OpEdNews in conjunction with The Pen, an "action statement," a link that will take you to an "action page," in which you may quickly and easily send your message of opposition to HR 3146, S 1349, and S 1504—your message in support of local cable franchises and Community Access TV—simultaneously to your senators and representative and, if you wish, your local newspaper (all identified for you by the automated system). Thank you for your support!