

Dear Editor:

Finally, there is something on which all Big Ten fans can agree. The Conference's attempt to strong-arm excessive programming fees for previously free over-the-air sports events through its new Big Ten Network is a flagrant foul.

BTN is attempting to exact fees of more than \$1 per consumer per month from cable providers to carry the network when it launches in August. If cable providers cave in and agree, those costs undoubtedly will be passed directly on to consumers in the form of another cable rate increase.

That is simply wrong.

For years now, Consumers for Competitive Choice has fought to bring healthy competition to the cable industry. We've railed against the high prices Big Cable has forced on its customers. In this instance, it's cable companies who are fighting for the little guy.

The Big Ten seems to have forgotten that taxpayers built and continue to support the public universities that comprise the conference. They're shamefully trying to pick our pockets because they know we want to follow our team and think we'll pay anything to do it. That's just not fair, and it demonstrates clearly how exclusive control (aka monopolies) almost always leads those in control to abuse the end user.

Congressman John Dingell of Michigan has asked the Big Ten to come clean with how they came up with their rates, where they'll spread that financial gain and which games they will allow to be shown on free TV.

The Big Ten should answer the Congressman and negotiate fairly with cable providers to ensure all fans have affordable access to the games. And if it doesn't Congressman Dingell should do more than throw a flag – he should use his position on the Commerce Committee to find a way to eject the BTN and put the games on free TV where they started.

Sincerely,

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Robert K. Johnson is President of Consumers for Competitive Choice, a national alliance of public interest groups dedicated to bringing competition to consumers in the areas of communications, health care, energy and finance.

To learn more, visit: www.Consumers4Choice.org

