

United States House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet
Digital Future of the United States: Part V: The Future of
Video

Washington, DC
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Testimony of Robert K. Johnson
On behalf of
Consumers for Cable Choice

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Bob Johnson. I am President of Consumers for Cable Choice (C4CC), a national coalition of more than two-dozen consumer groups that collectively represent more than 500,000 consumers. Our members are a diverse group of consumers from all socioeconomic, ethnic and demographic fabrics. They are bound together by one common thread — their support for fair and comprehensive broadband competition.

On behalf of those American consumers from all walks of life all across the nation, I rise today in support of unfettered development of broadband competition and the widest possible deployment of broadband networks. A ubiquitous broadband network is the foundation of a vibrant video marketplace.

Our members are calling on our nation's policy makers to encourage broadband competition and further consumer access to broadband networks -- and avoid onerous operational restrictions that could impede that progress.

Our members joined other consumers across the nation in asking the FCC to open the video market to competition last year, and the Commission listened. We sought such action to encourage cable competition as a means to speed the deployment of broadband, improve service quality and lower rates.

On behalf of C4CC's coalition members, I ask you to use this opportunity to further advance the case of broadband competition and not be waylaid by other issues, such as so-called 'net neutrality,' or as it could more accurately be called, net regulation. Net regulation would stifle broadband competition and keep consumers from reaping the benefits of full broadband innovation, deployment and access.

At present, data and voice communications services are offered in a highly competitive arena where consumers are in charge. The video market is still largely encumbered by outdated regulations, but that is changing daily as more and more states enact video reform legislation.

As with progress of any kind, there will be those who worry about the parochial impact on their personal and business interests. Such is the case, in this instance, with net neutrality. In any event, to borrow a local saying, net neutrality is the tail, not the dog. Primary policy focus should remain on the robust deployment of broadband infrastructure throughout the nation.

What is critical now as we begin to open broadband cable markets to competition is that we make no policy that could reverse the trend. Cable competition will stimulate the communications industry to invest billions of dollars in building and deploying broadband networks.

These new and expanded broadband networks are exactly what customers require as their hunger for high-bandwidth services, such as video streaming from YouTube and Netflix, grows. That hunger cannot be satisfied by today's broadband networks. It is imperative that broadband network providers have an unregulated market in which to compete openly and fairly, free from government interference. Competition to win more customers by offering the fastest service with the most innovations is what drives broadband companies to continually invest in and upgrade their networks.

Robust broadband infrastructure will pave the way for dynamic consumer video applications in the next decade. The House should nurture that infrastructure and resist erecting barriers that may frustrate its deployment. Consumers are waiting for telemedicine, tele-education and innovative entertainment options that will enrich their lives. A ubiquitous broadband network is essential to meeting that consumer demand.

Nielsen/Net Ratings in December 2006 showed 78 percent of active home Web users were connected via broadband during November 2006. That's up 13 percentage points from 65 percent of active Web users in 2005. Today's growth is nothing compared to the future exponential broadband growth experts predict will be needed.

Will we have the broadband networks to meet the demand? Only if policies embrace unfettered development of broadband networks. Our nation and its consumers will be best served by a government that allows free-market competition to work and broadband investments to flow.

Thank you.

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