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NEWS

U. S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 13, 1993

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SENATOR BOB DOLE STATEMENT
CABLE TELEVISION

WASHINGTON - Last week, millions of Americans opened up their newspapers to discover that the cable television legislation passed by Congress last year was going into effect--and that their cable rates were going up.

As a result, there are quite a few members of this chamber--and quite a few folks at the White House--who should be reaching for the fork they will need to eat a big helping of crow.

Proponents of the cable legislation assured Americans last year that burdensome regulations--and not competition--would bring lower rates. And they wasted no time in proving that the entire debate was not about legislation sound policy. It was about embarrassing then-President Bush.

When President Bush rightly vetoed the bill, the Clinton campaign team swung into high gear.

George Stephanopoulos stated--and I quote--"Bush has vetoed the most important consumer legislation of the year -- all to protect his rich friends in the cable monopolies."

And my good friend Vice President Gore was one of the biggest proponents of reregulating cable tv. He said, quote: "I'm going to direct this to the President: If you veto the cable bill, you (will) have sided with the monopolists and against the American people. And the American people may just veto your desire for another four years."

So let's set the record straight. President Bush did not veto the bill because he was siding with cable companies, but because he believed that it would, as he stated, "Hurt Americans by imposing a wide array of costly, burdensome and unnecessary requirements on the cable industry and the government agencies that regulate it."

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No doubt about it, there is no judge like Father Time. I guess there is some good news for consumers--and that's the fact that the Administration has not made any effort to make these cable rate increases retroactive.

Increased rates are not the only problem. This morning's Washington Post points out that cable tv companies are dropping C-Span coverage for home shopping channels of all things. I'll bet that wasn't intended either. But what do you expect when you give broadcasters the right to demand carriage on their local cable tv system and the system is full? Something has to give and in this case it was C-Span.

So where do we go from here? I say it's time for a reality check. Whether we like it or not, technology is changing the communications industry each day. And only competition, not burdensome regulations, can accomodate these advancements.

However, because Vongress doesn't understand this, it has a penchant for enacting archaic legislation. As a result, we block competition from stimulating the communications industry and providing consumers with better services. And if we don't act quickly, we might as well say "sayonara" to the one industry in the world that we still dominate.

The Cable TV Act catastrophe has only reinforced my belief that true competition is the best regulator of the marketplace. I can only hope that my colleagues will come to the same conclusion before it is too late.

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