

Paul Soglin: Waxing America

A candid examination of right-wing policies and the Democrats who play along and the horrid liberal policies designed to assuage the moderates but end up irritating everyone. And other stuff.

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Chad Vader Creators Take Lightsaber to Tom Still's Assertions About Cutting Funding For Local Cable Access

Tom Still published [a piece Tuesday in WisOpinion](#) arguing against continuing to fund local access TV channels, and cited the success of the creators of Chad Vader, Madison's Aaron Yonda and Matt Sloan of [Blame Society Productions](#), as justification for his position against local cable franchises, which just happens to exactly mirror at&t's legislative efforts. Yonda and Sloan have enjoyed so much local ([Isthmus](#), [Cap Times](#)) and national press (Good Morning America, VH1) that they hardly need any little additional hype from WaxingAmerica.

Still, who is the head of the Wisconsin Technology Council, wrote:

The Legislature is considering a proposal to allow AT&T, the world's largest telecommunications company, to enter the subscription television market, improve its Internet services and provide computer-linked telephone service. That would essentially set up competition between AT&T and cable companies, the largest of which in Wisconsin are Time Warner Cable and Charter.

...But opening up the market won't be that simple. Wisconsin municipalities, which have collected fees from cable companies for years, want to make sure they secure a similar arrangement with AT&T. Those same municipalities want AT&T to pony up money to support local public, education and government television channels – collectively known as “local access” channels.

That brings us back to Chad Vader and YouTube, which may be the public access channel of the 21st century. At a time when a couple of filmmakers in Madison can create a series that gets 7 million hits on the Internet, is it really necessary to subsidize public access television channels?

...Granted, local access television can be a vital part of community democracy, but it's no longer the only game in town. The Internet, with blogs, podcasts, YouTube and more, is changing that landscape a lot faster than local regulators can regulate.

As members of the Legislature consider state “video franchising,” they should keep the big picture in mind. The Internet is changing the telecom world. Governments need to create regulatory frameworks that anticipate change; that expect new technologies. They should not be clinging to regulatory frameworks that lock them into a specific technology, because such an approach will ultimately

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As the Manager of Madison City Channel, the City's local government television station, I was disappointed as well by Tom's comments. How likely is it going to be that you will see an entire Madison Common Council meeting on YouTube anytime soon? Not very.

And it is of course true that Madison City Channel does stream (live and archived) all of the programming we produce (meeting coverage, candidate forums, public affairs programs, coverage of other special meetings, presentations and events) on our website at www.mcc12.tv, but we wouldn't be able to do any of this without the resources we have been entrusted with through the small fee that Madison Charter subscribers pay each month - a fee that was negotiated and voted on by local elected officials as being appropriate for Madison. It wasn't some arbitrary "one size fits all" fee determined on a statewide level.

Local franchising isn't broken. It doesn't need to be fixed. If AT&T is serious about providing competition to Charter in Madison they could come to an agreement with us VERY quickly. The City is not holding up progress. Let's go!

Posted by: [Brad Clark](#) | [February 23, 2007 at 10:56 AM](#)

Serving as a board member of Eau Claire's public access channels, Community TV (11 & 12), I see the current argument by the telephone companies as disingenuous. To claim they don't have the ability to offer service is bogus on it's face. Any company is welcome to come into a community and offer its service. That process includes dealing with the local governments on such issues as public access channels. What this proposed legislation does is remove local input and by cutting funding, opens up more channels for commercial (read \$\$\$\$) utilization. To claim the internet supercedes the need for public access ignores such a broad range of constituents and facts as to be laughable. Unfortunately, it makes a great sound bite.

On the other hand, in converstaions with small telecommunications company executives I have learned that local governments have created obstacles in the process of granting new service access to some areas. An example of this would be where a local government won't convene the appropriate committee, or demands unreasonable services or concessions of the company.

My point in bringing this up is that it's important to understand both sides of the issue so that a solution addresses the concerns of all the parties involved.

Posted by: [Stan Carpenter](#) | [February 23, 2007 at 11:05 AM](#)

You know I hear all sorts of horror stories about cities making unreasonable demands in exchange for cable TV franchises. What I haven't heard or seen yet are specific, verifiable instances where that has happened

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