

C O P Y

[REDACTED]
Sebring FL 33870-9645

February 16, 1999

Mr. Larry Trammell
General Manager
Comcast Cablevision
3010 Herring Avenue
Sebring FL 33870

Re: a/c No. [REDACTED]

Dear Mr. Trammell:

We wish to discontinue our subscription to Comcast Cable, effective immediately, for reasons cited below.

We returned to Sebring early February after a short absence, to find that we could no longer receive C-Span on channel 19. A call to your office on February 3rd revealed that you had arbitrarily removed C-Span from our Limited Basic schedule, and that we would have to pay an additional fee--i.e., subscribe to Standard Service, a more expensive programming--in order to receive that program. The quality of the replacement channel does not begin to compare, either in quality or substance. We can afford the upgrading, but choose instead to turn to satellite as a protest--both for ourselves and for those who cannot afford to switch--against the removal of C-Span from our programming.

C-Span is the single best thing about cable, and has been touted in the past as a public service for cable customers to permit them to see American politics in action, without editing. As an educational tool, it cannot be surpassed and your action therefore is surprising: The wealthy are usually educated and seldom need a lesson in civics, yet it is to those that you are making the program easily accessible. Carrying Coals to Newcastle may not be an appropriate analogy, but it comes close enough. We understand the principles of capitalism, but that system is meant to work on a level playing field of competition in order to also offer customers like choices. Since COMCAST is the only cable game in town, the system becomes something else that seems unprincipled, even if not illegal. It is not something we expected from a Class Act like C-Span, and it is disconcerting and disappointing to be presented with an image of a mercenary Brian Lamb (who is the best-known symbol of that program), an image that is projected even if that was not the intent.

We also question what, at least on the surface, appears to be such a poor business decision: We live in a subdivision of some 30 homes and our switch to satellite brings to a total of 8 the number of families--or about one-fourth of the residents--who have switched from cable. A quick canvass of subscribers indicates the decision was generally made as a protest against cable companies, rather than an interest in increasing the number of available channels. A twenty-five percent (25 percent) loss of customers seems to me quite high for any business, and one has to wonder at the lack of concern on the part of COMCAST. Because of the initial expense of purchase, it is unlikely that cable can woo back any of these customers. Cable may have lost a small profit in the short run, but considerably more in the long. Should you not be looking for new customers, rather than losing the old? It is also a curious decision to make for a company that suffers from a somewhat tarnished image.

Of course, logic and ethics go out the window when a monopoly is involved, which is why we are sending a copy of this letter to our Congressmen. It is far easier for a company to hold a community hostage to high prices when it is the only game in town, which is an indication that this area needs competition in the field of cablevision. It is true that you are providing a service that is optional, and not necessary to sustain a minimum quality of life; however, without customers for this elective service, you in turn would have no reason to exist. What should be a mutually beneficial venture has turned into a distasteful

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manipulation by a monopoly. A look at demographics of the Sebring area reveals a population consisting of wage-earners whose salaries reflect the lack of industry and high tech employers, as well as a considerable number of retirees, many of them blue collar. This community is not wealthy, but nevertheless has helped you stay solvent by giving you its business; it is unfortunate that you feel no such obligation toward that same community. The "Letters to the Editor" column of local newspapers indicate that these feelings are shared by others, and please keep in mind that only a small percentage of the population takes the time to write those letters that so often reflect the feelings of others.

We might note that the reason we switched from what was then known as Basic to Limited Basic was in protest against the regular increase in fees, far above the norm of cost-of-living increases in other service areas.

We hope that C-Span will one day be provided to all cable viewers, not to only those who can afford it. That would truly be a "public service."

Please call us at [REDACTED] to arrange to disconnect our cable service, and leave a message on the answering machine if we are not home. We will call back to arrange a date for disconnection. I believe we have a credit on our account; please provide a statement and refund for the balance.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

cc: C-Span

Senator Bob Graham
Senator Connie Mack
News-Sun

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