

“VIDEO CONSPIRACY”

There’s a conspiracy going on here, in the state of Wisconsin. Yes, a conspiracy. Mostly, it’s a conspiracy of silence...and it’s taking place again, yes you guessed it, at our state capitol.

What’s going on will again change one of the important little nuances in our lives forever.

We’re pretty sure that like us, most of you enjoy the local programming provided by our local cable outlet. As a matter of fact, the local programming provided to us through the agreement between our city and Comcast Cable might just be some of the best local programming anywhere in Wisconsin. Lots of people agree with this statement.

How many of us have enjoyed watching a great basketball or football game on good ole’ channel 20. Lincoln, Lutheran and Roncalli fans unable to get to the game for whatever reason have been able to sit at home, in front of their TV and take in their favorite teams exploits, all complimentary of the local franchising agreement between the City of Manitowoc and Comcast. Similar is true in Two Rivers between that city and Charter Cable.

And how many of us have used his same service to help an aging grandparent or invalid spouse see their son or daughter or grandson or granddaughter play another great game of ball at their local high school sports venue. Then, too, how many of us have taped one of Comcast’s great sports coverages of a game played by Roncalli, Lincoln or Lutheran?

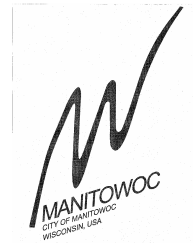
Well, all these things that we are used to, due to one of the few rights left to citizens in regard to the regulation of the cable industry, may come to an abrupt end due to special interest activity in Madison.

You see, AT&T (the “telephone company”) wants to get into the business of providing video to some of our homes. Under the guise of “competition”, AT&T is trying to provide this “cable” service in Wisconsin (as they have in other states) by getting our state government to pass a law saying that their cable operation is “different” than that provided by Comcast and, therefore, they should not have to come to an agreement with any city that would provide for things like “local programming”, which is the area of our agreement with Comcast that sends local high school sports into our homes throughout the school year.

If AT&T gets their way, it would seem that the only way for the legislature to be fair (in their minds) to Comcast and other cable operators in Wisconsin would be to allow them to operate without a local agreement as well. When that has happened in other states, the first thing to go from cable’s list of offerings is local high school sports, other locally produced shows like Law Talk, regular legislative updates, parade coverage and the broadcasts of City Council and County Board meetings.

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If all this happens in Wisconsin, and this legislation is currently active in our legislature, then our city would also lose control of things like siting equipment cabinets in our lawn terraces in public rights of way.

AT&T's equipment cabinets are huge, bigger than anything I've ever seen used before (about the size of a large home entertainment center), and letting them operate without an agreement with the city will allow them to place their "stuff" anywhere in front of anybody's house that is most convenient for them, without regard for the aesthetics of a neighborhood.

Again, as we said earlier, all this is being done under the flag of competition by AT&T, but the truth is that it's not the telephone company's intent to serve an entire community, just to "cherry pick" those areas that are most profitable.

While the legislation is complex, one simple outcome remains the same. If this conspiracy of silence by the legislature continues and AT&T and the Cable systems are successful, regardless of your age or health status, you'll never again be able to enjoy watching your favorite local team or athlete perform in the comfort of your living room.

We need to contact Senator Joe Leibham and Assemblyman Bob Ziegelbauer and tell them to vote against the desires of AT&T and the Cable Companies and keep local programming alive for the citizens of Manitowoc and Two Rivers.

Manitowoc Mayor Kevin Crawford may be reached at 920-686-6980.