

Notes taken from Technology Daily, 1/24/07, David Hatch,
edited by Lois Romanoff

The Committee most likely to investigate the FCC's 12/20/06 decision on Video Franchising is the House Energy & Commerce Committee.

Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., is the new chairman of the House Energy & Commerce Committee, which will be investigating telecommunications legislation. Last year, Dingell was against AT&T, BellSouth (now part of AT&T) & Verizon Communications, as they sought to:

- eliminate local franchise restrictions &
- prevent regulation of their growing high-speed Internet businesses.

Dingell said, during committee action on the measure, "This bill threatens real harm to consumers, to our communities and to citizens of the Internet. Many people will be worse off after this bill than they are today. I urge a no vote."

However, it is also important to note that Dingell was a central figure in passing the watershed, detrimental, 1996 Telecommunications Act.

Dingell's priorities are: 1.) fresh telecom legislation with a more deregulatory focus, 2.) further examination of television "indecentcy", a perennial concern, & 3.) renewed efforts to overhaul the multibillion-dollar universal service fund that subsidizes telecom services in rural & impoverished areas.

The second-highest ranking Democrat on the Energy and Commerce Committee is Rep. Henry Waxman of California, he supports retaining and strengthening the FCC's limits on media ownership, which are now under agency review , & voted against last year's telecom bill.

On the Republican side, a new face at the Energy & Commerce panel is former House Speaker Dennis Hastert of Illinois, who served on the panel before becoming speaker in late '98. Known for his strong Bell support, he voted for last yr's industry-endorsed legislation- COPE.

About 8 other members, both Democrats & Republicans, who have supported both sides of the issue, for/against COPE, will be on the Comm, as well as 5 Democratic newcomers who have limited tech backgrounds.

This is a very mixed bag of views & past legislative history so it is hard to get too excited about their upholding the public interest over corporate benefits.