



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
GARY HEBL
46TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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PRESS RELEASE

**REP. HEBL APPLAUDS GOVERNOR FOR PROTECTING
CONSUMERS AND MUNICIPALITIES IN PARTIAL VETO OF CABLE BILL**

MADISON - State Representative Gary Hebl (D-46th Assembly District) applauded Governor Jim Doyle Friday for protecting Wisconsin's consumers and municipalities with his partial veto pen on Assembly Bill 207, also known as the Video Franchise Bill.

The new law, which takes effect in 2008, will replace the system of local governments awarding cable TV franchises with a system of state-awarded franchises. Much has been made of the affect this bill would have on competition, but in reality there's no reason why cable companies couldn't enter the market before today, Hebl said.

"While I would have preferred a veto of the whole bill, I would like to thank Governor Doyle for using his partial veto power to protect Wisconsin's consumers and municipalities," Hebl said. "From the beginning of this process, I have had serious concerns about the way this legislation was written and introduced, and all cable customers in Wisconsin received an early holiday present from the Governor today with the important changes he made."

Hebl said the key changes he applauded in the bill were:

- **RULE-MAKING:** Establishes rule-making authority for the Department of Financial Institutions (DFI) and the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. The original bill limited the ability of these institutions to make rules to protect consumers. As a result, the Governor's partial vetoes will allow DFI to set the length of franchises for video service providers and the size of the fees those providers have to pay;
- **CABLE ACCESS STATIONS:** As written, the original bill stated that Public, Education and Government channels are defined as noncommercial. By striking the word "noncommercial," the Governor gave these channels the ability to air revenue-generating commercial programming.

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- **SERVICE OUTAGES:** Maintains the current law standard that if service is interrupted for more than 4 hours in any one day, the video service provider must give subscribers credit for that outage. As originally passed, the bill would have allowed interruptions of up to 24 hours without providing credit and would have eroded one of the primary statutory consumer protections.
- **MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY:** Grants the Public Service Commission the ability to review municipal regulation of the occupation and use of public rights-of-way. The intent of this partial veto is to allow the Commission the ability to review the regulation and make a determination based on the merits.

Hebl, who has been involved in Sun Prairie's Cable Access Board for many years, has been a leader of efforts to reform the bill since it was introduced early this year.

"Wisconsin has a long, progressive history which includes strong consumer protections, but AB207 betrayed that legacy in an effort to pass a bill written *by* lobbyists *for* corporations," Hebl said. "These vetoes make sure state agencies have the ability to regulate and make sure the cable industry is responsible for the cost of that regulation - just like any other regulated industry."

Hebl said there are still other issues that should be addressed by future legislative action. And with other states having seen little or no reduction in the cost of their cable bills, Hebl said the Legislature should carefully monitor whether AB207 is having its intended effect.

"People in many areas of the state won't see any competition after this bill is passed because companies such as AT&T have no plans to provide service beyond their existing service footprint, which covers less than half of the state," Hebl said. "I still believe the rules shouldn't change for areas which don't expect to receive competition, but again I want to thank the Governor for his efforts to make this a better bill."

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