

**COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATION/INFORMATION SYSTEMS
(PUBLIC HEARING)**

July 14, 1998

6:30 PM

Chairman Pariseau called the meeting to order.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Aldermen Pariseau, Rivard, Girard (late), O'Neil

Absent: Aldermen Thibault

Chairman Pariseau advised that pursuant to Section 626 of the Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984, the purpose of the public hearing is to identify future cable related community needs and interests and also to review MediaOne's performance under the current Cable Television Renewal Franchise; that each person will be given only one opportunity to speak; that comments shall be limited to three minutes to allow all participants the opportunity to speak and any comments must be directed to the Chair.

Chairman Pariseau requested that any resident wishing to speak come forward to the nearest microphone, clearly state their name and address when recognized, and give their comments.

Bryan Murray, 16 Wedgewood Lane, Manchester, NH stated I am here tonight because I am concerned about the renegotiation with the MediaOne Group regarding cable TV in the City of Manchester. I am concerned because the past history of the MediaOne group has shown a primary interest in profit and not consumer relations or service. We had a 17% increase the past year. That was almost three times the national average for cable TV service providers. Regarding service, we have no 24 hour coverage with bonafide MediaOne Group employees. They contract out to people in a remote location, service calls. People have commented that they have to claim credit when service is down. That is, in fact, true. I would ask that you look at the service provided when you renegotiate the contract. The response to consumer programming desires, to be quite honest, defaults to the profitability bottom line. People have complained about losing channels in the basic life line and Tier 1 and Tier 2. MediaOne, as far as I know, has done no market analysis or surveys that are consumer-oriented within NH. All

surveys that I am aware of were made in Massachusetts and the market surveys did not support their addition of the Disney Channel combined with a price increase but they did it anyway. They knew where they were going and they proceeded along that path. I am concerned that the Broadband technology has been accommodated on the backs of cable TV subscribers in Manchester. We are still waiting for Internet access, however, what we have done is we have borne the cost of the infrastructure upgrades that they have made throughout their network. Where will it end? What happens when they accommodate telephony into the factor into this network. This is coming. TCI, AT&T have already identified that they are going to do it. MediaOne, in fact, has identified that they are going to do it. Franchise fees equal taxes. When you renegotiate your contract, I presume there will be a temptation to go to 5%. That, again, to me means a tax increase. Of course the MediaOne Group will pass on any franchise fees directly to the subscribers. Also of note would be how are they going to accommodate franchise fees into their Internet access and telephony within the network. Are we going to pay tax on those services or are they going to break it out as they currently do for all cable TV costs to include pay per view? These are things that cannot be discounted in negotiation. Where does the money go from the franchise fees? This 4% that we are currently getting now needs to be looked at very carefully. Maybe we need to funnel more into PEG as people have indicated that PEG is deficient and needs to expand within Manchester. Again, I am assuming we get about half a million a year from the franchise fees. Where does that money go to? Again, three minutes is not very long. I am very concerned that when we renegotiate we look at the Telecommunications Act of 1996 as it was designed to provide competition within the telecommunications industry and I would recommend or suggest that we look at multiple cable TV subscribers within the City. We are not limited to just MediaOne Group. We have had numerous changes in the City of Manchester in the past years. There is a great possibility that they could sell out and we would be confronted with a new company coming in and taking over the existing contract. I think we should spread out a little and give consumers some alternatives. Thank you.

Bill Moquin, 103 East Gate Way, Manchester, NH stated I am a past navigator of the Bishop Bradley Assembly of the Knights of Columbus and a past Grand Commander of the Order of the El Hambre. In 1992, I think around that time, we paid \$3,000 for equipment needed to add the Eternal Word Television Network to United Cable, Sam Phillips' company at the time. Continental Cable took over United Cable and in 1994 started broadcasting EWTN Network 24 hours a day because we had EWTN viewers write or call the cable company to prove that the majority of the customers wanted EWTN 24 hours a day. MediaOne took over not too long ago and started cutbacks in EWTN Network programming. MediaOne Cable Company said there is a low interest in viewership in religious

programming in this area. That was said by other cable companies in Manchester, NH in the past years and we proved them wrong with a survey, with people calling and writing. The interest in Catholic religion programming is high in the MediaOne cable area. We have much more Catholics in Manchester, NH area than any part of the State of NH. People don't realize that we have 26 Catholic parishes and have much more members of Catholic organizations in the MediaOne viewing area of Manchester, NH. A lot of people in nursing homes, the elderly and the sick people, depend on viewing spiritual programs because some know that they have a short time left on this earth. There are some people that cannot walk and some people that cannot move out of bed. That spiritual network programming is part of living for them because they are seeing the Mass and the encouragement to keep living and it is very important. Since MediaOne split the channels, many people were left without their spiritual programs because they could not afford the cost of EWTN anymore and the reason for that is when you move it to 56, if they had moved it back to a basic channel...well if you move it back to a basic channel it is going to be much cheaper for them. If they buy the box, especially older people, that costs maybe \$100 or what and secondly some would have to buy a new TV because they have the old style TV you know. I think one solution would be to move EWTN to the basic channel, number one channel. That cost would be \$5.84 for these older people who can't afford that compared to going into the second phase of basic that is \$20 or whatever. We have started a campaign with others to have people write and call MediaOne Cable Company to televise EWTN 24 hours a day like we had in the past. The Knights of Columbus and the El Hambre are big supporters of EWTN Network. All over the country for years the Knights of Columbus has supported Mother Angelica's program because of the spiritual enrichment that people get out of it. I have been a coordinator to help EWTN Network since we put EWTN in Manchester. I have been to different parts of the State because I believe in this, especially people that are sick and they need that spiritual programming. A priest and a couple of guys and myself sat down with Sam Phillips of United Cable Company and we came up with one religious program 12 hours a piece but what happened was as EWTN increased over the maybe six or seven years, the program was getting much bigger and showing more programs and we could see there was an increase of people that wanted it 24 hours a day. When Continental came in, they agreed, when I had all the people write or call and we had you know you are talking thousands of people calling and getting involved, I predict in this survey we are going to have now, you are going to have maybe 4,000 to 5,000 people with letters and calls like we did in the past. The reason why I didn't come out openly recently on this is because there was other people that were involved with it. They have already been involved. I saw it in the Union Leader and I had some calls and I jumped in. So the way the Union Leader read, someone from MediaOne or whatever said

there was a low interest. That isn't so and we will prove that. That is all I have to say. Thank you very much.

Elphege Roy, 103 Oak Street, Manchester, NH stated I am a retired high school teacher and administrator. I was here when we opened the school in 1960 so it is coming back, my memories here. What I would like to say is that like this gentleman just said, there is an awful lot of people who are disappointed that EWTN is not being shown 24 hours a day. Don't get me wrong, it is not just Mother Angelica, there is an awful lot of very good programming on EWTN, very cultural programs, nice concerts, nice discussions, there is all kinds of things on EWTN and I think that a lot of people are missing EWTN. You know here in the United States we always think that bigger is better. That is not true. MediaOne might be bigger, but as far as we are concerned it is not better. In fact, it is worse because we are getting less and paying more. So, this is why I just would like to ask you gentlemen is there anybody here who represents MediaOne?

Chairman Pariseau answered yes there is, Mr. Roy, but you have to address this Committee.

Mr. Roy stated so I would just want to say that I would like you to reconsider that and bring back EWTN 24 hours a day. Thank you.

Jay Syrene, 66 Broadhead Avenue, Manchester, NH stated I recently graduated from Memorial High School and attended video production classes at the Manchester School of Technology. This fall, I will be enrolled full-time at Emerson College majoring in Communications. I attribute my acceptance and financial aid package to the experience and knowledge I gained through classes at Manchester Community Television. What I took away was so much more than knowledge memorized from a textbook. Channel 16 and its classes gave me goals, a dream, and more importantly a forum to help me live that dream. It gave me the opportunity, through its equipment and cable access, to express my talents. Just my association with such a reputable program earned me acceptance and over \$16,000 in financial assistance at a highly competitive communications school. Many teens meander through their high school career and years thereafter with no plans or opportunities for the future. They may attend college with an undeclared major or realize after they graduate and work in the field that they have already chosen the wrong major. That is the beauty of a program like the one that MCTV provides at the Manchester School of Technology. They teach you valuable skills in the classroom and then let you apply them in a real job situation. Not a job situation with a screaming boss, but one with a helpful adviser. Last year, MCTV was voted the best public access station in the country. The best in the country. It is like we are the NBC of public access and for our City to be perennially known

across the country for something like that is just phenomenal. Public access television is a medium for every citizen of our City to express their concerns and ideas. That is democracy in its purest form and that is what makes our City so great. In today's ultra competitive world, one needs any and all advantages they can get. The Manchester Community Television and its video production course gave me more than that. With its equipment and full studio, MCTV provides a ladder of stepping stones for Manchester's youth and all of its citizens alike. They gave me training in the field of communications that any college student would envy. With the training I have on Beta cams and video editing equipment and much, much more, I could already get a job working in the field of communications. Now Manchester Community Television needs the equipment that would bring it into the 21st century so it can better serve our City and its people. Right now, MCTV gets 1% of the cable gross and I ask you in the cable negotiations it is eligible to get 5% so I ask you please if you could because right now MCTV gets like 1% of the cable gross and it is eligible for 5%. So I am asking you if it can get, it deserves 5%.

There being no one else present wishing to speak, on motion of Alderman Rivard, duly seconded by Alderman O'Neil it was voted to take all comments under advisement and further to receive and file any written documentation presented.

There being no further business, on motion of Alderman Rivard, duly seconded by Alderman O'Neil, it was voted to adjourn.

A True Record. Attest.

Clerk of the Committee