Remote control

by Cal_Thomas

Every night around 11 o'clock my wife reluctantly relinquishes the remote control so that I can select the local newscast we will watch. The scene is familiar to millions of people for whom the TV remote can sometimes cause marital friction and spark a battle for the power to determine what others watch.On Tuesday, the Senate Commerce Committee held a hearing to discuss whether there is too much violence on cable and satellite TV and what to do about it. The issue of TV violence is the baby of Kevin J. Martin, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, who was scheduled to testify, but canceled at the last minute for family reasons. Martin thinks there is too much violence on subscription TV. The hearings went ahead without him as others testified for and against his proposal for federal regulation, which would make the point of the remote moot, as consumers could no longer control their entertainment choices.In testimony before the Senate Commerce Committee, an FCC representative was joined by at least one other commission member, one network executive and an advocacy group representative in support of legislation that would allow cable and satellite TV subscribers to select their programs "a la carte," meaning consumers could choose the networks they want to come into their homes and reject others. This cafeteria approach might sound good at first glance, but suppose someone didn't want to see the violence in Fox TV's "24," but did wish to see the violence of NFL football? Since Fox carries both, consumers who rejected Fox because of "24," would not be able to watch NFL football.Not only is this a bad business model in that cable and satellite TV make money by telling advertisers they can reach a certain number of homes, it also takes away the privileges and responsibilities of individuals to make these decisions. I don't want - and you shouldn't either - any government official or bureaucrat deciding which cable shows are good for me, and which ones are not. Much of this "I'm from the government and I'm here to help you" attitude derives from the supposed negative impact such programs have on children, but Census figures show that only one-third of American households have children 18 or under. Chairman Martin favors regulating all households to accommodate this relatively small percentage.It might be worth it if other avenues were not available to parents to control what their children watch, but those avenues exist in abundance. Parents can turn off, or even get rid of the TV; they can make use of the V-chip, now a part of all newer TV sets; they don't have to subscribe to cable or satellite TV; they can make use of the imperfect ratings system or they can monitor what their children watch.It amazes me that some conservatives who preach against "big government" control of our lives think nothing of rushing in to ask big government to control our entertainment choices.The a la carte approach is the worst of all worlds. Fox News could not have been launched in an a la carte environment, which might be good news for liberals, but bad news for those who wish to have another perspective on the news than what they got before Fox was born a decade ago. What about religious programming? Would conservative Christians, for example, wish to allow people to block all Christian programs when the opportunity to reach nonbelievers is a strong motivator for the people who produce them?One expects government regulation and control during a Democratic administration, but a Republican administration is supposed to be dedicated to the free market. The FCC's own study shows that in an ideal a la carte world, consumers would get 20 channels, but would pay the same price as today's 150 channels. Only those who don't mind buying one egg and paying for a dozen would be comfortable with such a deal.Those on the right who favor this proposed regulation had better think of the consequences. If the FCC and not the market control your entertainment choices, would a Democratic president and his (or her) appointees to the FCC feel emboldened to control the political dialogue? They surely would cite the entertainment regulations as precedent for coming after talk radio and anything else they deemed "harmful" to the public.Don't let them take your remote, because you won't get it back.(c) 2007 Tribune Media Services, Inc.