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United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510–4504

August 7, 2008

Mr. David L. Cohen
Executive Vice President
Comcast Corporation
One Comcast Center
Philadelphia, PA 19103-2838

Dear Mr. Cohen:

This letter is a follow up to our recent meeting concerning Comcast's service changes in Vermont. I appreciate you and your staff taking the time to meet with me to discuss my serious concerns about these changes and your willingness to send a Vermont Comcast representative to the Town Meeting I will hold in Rutland on August 14.

As we discussed, I believe that Comcast is being unfair to consumers in Vermont who see, as I do, the number of channels in their analog cable packages going down without a reduction in price as a rate hike. When people pay the same amount of money to receive less service, that is a rate hike, plain and simple. Similarly, the additional fees associated with digital equipment for customers who are required to migrate to digital service to get their old channels also constitutes a rate increase. While I understand that Comcast is offering Expanded Cable customers moving to the digital tier the same price they are currently paying, in addition to providing one free converter box, and two additional boxes at a reduced price for a year, I am concerned that when these deals expire, Vermonters will have to pay more money by way of the monthly converter box fee to access the same channels. In addition, it is unclear from your published materials which tiers these price and converter box special offers apply to. Until recently Vermont customers were receiving these channels for an average of $16.63, $39.31, and $55.94 a month respectively for Basic, Standard, and Expanded Cable. I believe they should be given the opportunity to get the channels they had previously at the exact same price.

More than 100 Vermonters have contacted my office in recent weeks to express their objection to Comcast's actions. In my meeting with you and the other Comcast representatives you stated that the movement to more all-digital programming is the direction of the cable industry and that consumers would just have to adjust to this change. I believe, as do the many Vermonters who have contacted my office that customers should not have to pay more to access the same channels they have been enjoying in their analog packages.

It has also been brought to my attention that new cable customers who subscribe to your service on your company's Website often receive special web-only offers that may not be available to customers who place an order by telephone. Some Vermonters, including senior citizens, may not have access to the Internet. These people should not be disadvantaged merely because they do not have Internet access.

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Finally, it is no secret that Vermont customers are frustrated by the lack of input into the channels that were moved or that are available in their area, by cable prices, and by the long waiting times experienced when they call Comcast for assistance — to name a few. As was reported by the *Washington Post*, in a recent national survey on customer satisfaction conducted by the University of Michigan, Comcast tied for last place among cable, satellite and television providers and was last in fixed-line telephone service. I think Comcast needs to do more to improve its customer service by providing Vermonters with a regular opportunity to publicly voice their concerns and ask questions about pricing, channel line-ups, and other matters.

To address these concerns, I am formally requesting that Comcast make the following changes to their service in Vermont:

1. **Per-Channel Price Reduction:** I request that Comcast provide a per-channel price reduction to people who have Basic, Standard, or Expanded analog cable who have lost channels, but are still paying the same price for less service;
2. **No Change in Price For Service or Digital Box(es) for People Seeking to Recover Channels They Previously Had on Analog Cable:** Comcast should lease, at no cost, digital set-top cable box(es) to everyone who would need one to get the channels that were moved from analog to the digital starter tier while keeping their Basic, Expanded, and Standard pricing. This offer should remain open for those that sign up in the next six months rather than by August 15th as is the case in Rutland;
3. **Same Deals Over the Phone as Online:** I ask that Comcast offer the same deals and discounts to individuals ordering over the phone as you do to people who subscribe to your service on line; and
4. **Commitment to Periodic Public Meetings:** I ask that Comcast hold, in conjunction with a state or local authority, at least one yearly public meeting, at a convenient time and location. These meetings would provide customers with a greater understanding of Comcast's technology changes, pricing plans, channel lineup and other services while also giving Vermonters the opportunity to voice their concerns and ask questions.

It is my hope that you will consider these reasonable proposals to make Comcast's digital programming changes fairer to its analog customers in Vermont. I appreciate your commitment to eliminating the $16.95 installation fee (and provide retroactive credits to those already charged) that your company has in some cases been charging people who convert from analog to digital service.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests. I look forward to hearing from your representatives regarding these issues at the upcoming Town Meeting in Rutland.

Sincerely,

BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator

Cc: Lisa Nolen Birmingham, Director of Government Affairs, Comcast Cable - Vermont