

**THE BLOG****Porno for Patriots**

By Marty Kaplan

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FCC Chairman Kevin Martin's just-announced proposal that families should be able to decide what individual cable networks they get, rather than being stuck with whatever take-it-or-leave-it bundles of channels they're offered, has caused a delicious rift on the right.

On one side is the Parents Television Council, which has done a sterling job protesting how networks force unsuspecting Americans to watch animated characters' butt-cracks, and other affronts to decency. They're for unbundling. The V chip, they contend, is not enough. If parents want to keep MTV away from their kids' eyeballs, they have the right to stop it from getting into their homes, and paying for it, in the first place.

On the other side is Big Media. Their shill, a corporate-funded fake think tank called The Progress and Freedom Foundation, contends that a la carte programming will be financially ruinous to the cable industry. Here's the case that the Progress and Freedom guy, up against the Parents guy, made on CNBC: When you buy a newspaper, you don't get to unbundle it; even if you only want the sports section and the comics, you have to pay for the whole thing, which means that the paper gets enough revenue to support the news as well. (Or maybe it was the other way around; the analogy made me snort coffee up my nose.) In other words, if you unbundle, then the whole basis of the 500-channel universe is jeopardized.

What's hilarious is that the Progress and Freedom crowd's credo is competition, deregulation, individual choice, the glories of the marketplace. Except, of course, when consumer choice crimps media monopolies. Laissez-faire is fine, unless it laissez corporations to faire it on the merits of their goods rather than under the protection of a government-sanctioned racket.

So Big Media, in the name of individual sovereignty, is calling on Big Government to protect it from consumer freedom. And at the same time, the corporatist branch of conservatism is battling the culture wars flank of the same party. What's a good patriotic right-winger to do: support the right of Comcast and Viacom to require you to let homos in your house, or support the good folks at the No Nipple Coalition who could cause the stock price of NBC-Universal and Sony to tank?

My own vote is for unbundling. I'm all for consumer choice. If the non-family-friendly channels I like can't make it in the cable marketplace, I'm willing to find that content somewhere else. Online, say. Or in a book. In print, it'll always be at least a 500 channel world.