

Cable Coverage of Legislative Proceedings

Voters are able to watch federal government proceedings via c-span, but in many areas including Vermont, citizens are unable to view state governments in action on television.

There are new developments and new services in today's communication and cable markets. Local governments are exploring opportunities in telecommunications and cable. There are no fewer than 19 states that currently offer unedited cable coverage of government proceedings.

Alaska - Juneau PBS station KTOO provides about 14 hours per day of coverage of the Alaska legislature, distributed on a dedicated digital satellite channel to the majority of cable systems statewide. The state of Alaska has provided the digital encoder and receivers, but KTOO pays for the satellite channel and production costs with non-state funds, including a major grant from the city of Juneau.

California - the California Senate and Assembly separately operate and staff production of proceedings. The signal is given to the California channel, a nonprofit entity of the cable industry, which satellite uplinks the programming throughout California. Six and one-half hours per day are uplinked. The California channel independently produces other types of government-related coverage including proceedings of state agencies, regulatory boards and public affairs specials.

It was strict adherence to C-span model. They are funded by voluntary contributions from every cable system operated in California. Monthly contributions coming from 186 cable operators. These operators represent 6.2 million cable subscribers. Currently there are 108 cable systems carrying programming to over 4.9 million.

Michigan - MGTV is the name of the nonprofit arm of the cable industry producing unedited coverage of Michigan State government. Started in 1996, it currently covers executive branch boards and commissions such as the state board of education as well as oral arguments before the state supreme court. It is in the process of beginning gavel to gavel legislative coverage and is scheduled to begin uplinking later this year with substantial statewide coverage.

Minnesota - The Minnesota Senate and House each have a television production department responsible for televising legislative proceedings. The departments are funded as part of the legislative budget. In addition, the legislature appropriates funds for distributing the program locally on an UHF public television station and to cable outlets in greater Minnesota. The senate's television budget totals about \$650,000 per year. The distribution funds for both senate and house programming totals about \$375,000 per year. The house operating budget is about \$275,000 per year.

New Jersey - The New Jersey senate agreed in 1996 to allow for gavel to gavel coverage by CTN, a nonprofit arm of the cable industry with a substantial statewide distribution cable network. Discussions are underway with the house regarding possible coverage.

Nevada - Beginning in 1997, limited gavel to gavel proceedings of the Nevada legislature were tape-delayed on cable by a public access channel in Carson with some replays in the Las Vegas area. Coverage provided included house and senate floor action and limited committee hearings. The legislature also provided a closed circuit feed beginning in 1997. A Reno/Las Vegas PBS partnership also produced a 30-minute weekly summary of legislative activity.

Pennsylvania - Since 1994, the Pennsylvania legislature has provided program feeds to the Pennsylvania cable network (PCN), a nonprofit arm of the cable industry. PCN is a 24-hour channel with up to 14 hours per day falling into the public affairs category including gavel to gavel state government coverage. Founded in 1979, PCN is carried in more than two million homes. Programming is uplinked. PCN produces a substantial amount of non-legislative programming, some of which is also gavel to gavel.

Washington - TVW is an unaffiliated nonprofit funded through legislative appropriation and private gifts. It provides unedited coverage of all three branches of state government. In 1996, TVW produced 1,400 hours of original programming. TVW transmits its programming 24 hours per day which is received in about two-thirds of all cabled homes statewide. Its programming, both audio and video, is also available on the Internet.

Sources

Washington State's Public Affairs Network, <http://www.tvw.org>

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