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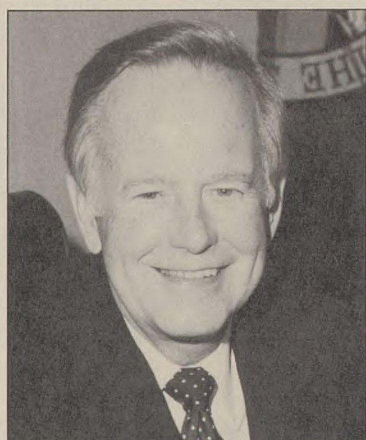
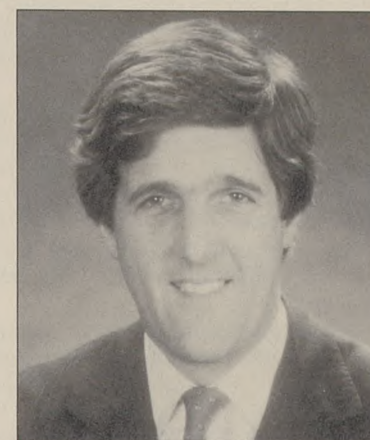
Congressional Consumer Support Rises





Four senators had perfect pro-consumer voting records, from left to right: Brock Adams (D-WA), Albert Gore, Jr. (D-TN), Edward Kennedy (D-MA), and John Kerry (D-MA).

The overall pro-consumer voting records of both Democrats and Republicans improved last year, according to a CFA report on 1990 congressional voting trends released in March.

Of particular note was the increased pro-consumer stance of House Republicans in general and freshmen House Republicans in particular. For the first time since CFA began compiling the congressional voting record, four House Republicans earned perfect pro-consumer scores.

This trend coincides with growing public concern over economic and social problems following a decade of laissez-faire politics, as well as an increasing willingness on the part of policymakers to compromise on consumer issues.

Fifty-five members of Congress—including 39 representatives and 16 senators—were named "Consumer Heroes" by CFA in recognition of their strong consumer voting records during the second session of the 101st Congress.

CFA also cited three representatives and seven senators as "Consumer Zeroes" for their continuing opposition to consumer interests.

The ratings are based on 18 key votes in the House and 12 in the Senate in 1990.

"Many of the votes were difficult ones. These Consumer Heroes stood by the interests of the consumer in the face of strong opposition and resistance from special interests," said CFA Legislative Director Gene Kimmelman.

The following are among the overall trends revealed by the vote analysis:

- Both houses voted for the consumer position more frequently than in the previous year, with an average of 56 percent of the votes in the Senate going with the consumer interest in 1990 and 68 percent in the House. In 1989, these respective averages were 53 percent and 61 percent.

This was the fourth consecutive year in which both houses of Congress voted in favor of the consumer on most votes.

1990 Congressional Heroes & Zeroes

Sixteen Senate Heroes voted with consumers at least 92 percent of the time:

Brock Adams (D-WA)
Albert Gore, Jr. (D-TN)
Edward Kennedy (D-MA)
John Kerry (D-MA)
Joseph Biden, Jr. (D-DE)
Bill Bradley (D-NJ)
Richard Bryan (D-NV)
Alan Cranston (D-CA)
Dennis DeConcini (D-AR)
Tom Harkin (D-IA)
Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ)
Joseph Lieberman (D-CT)
Howard Metzenbaum (D-OH)
Jay Rockefeller IV (D-WV)
Paul Simon (D-IL)
Timothy Wirth (D-CO)

Thirty-nine House Heroes had perfect 100 percent ratings:

Gary Ackerman (D-NY)
John Bryant (D-TX)
Benjamin Cardin (D-MD)
Silvio Conte (R-MA)
William Coyne (D-PA)
Julian Dixon (D-CA)
Eliot Engel (D-NY)
Lane Evans (D-IL)
Sam Gejdenson (D-CT)
Benjamin Gilman (R-NY)
Dennis Hertel (D-MI)
Peter Hoagland (D-NE)
Robert Kastenmeier (D-WI)
Dale Kildee (D-MI)
Gerald Kleczka (D-WI)
Mel Levine (D-CA)
John Lewis (D-GA)
Nita Lowey (D-NY)
Nicholas Mavroules (D-MA)
Jim McDermott (D-WA)
Matthew McHugh (D-NY)
Patsy Mink (D-HA)
Richard Neal (D-MA)
Henry Nowak (D-NY)
Major Owens (D-NY)
Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ)
Donald Payne (D-NJ)
Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)
Matthew Rinaldo (R-NJ)
Gus Savage (D-IL)
James Scheuer (D-NY)
Charles Schumer (D-NY)
Christopher Shays (R-CT)
Lawrence Smith (D-FL)
Gerry Studds (D-MA)
Bruce Vento (D-MN)
Doug Walgren (D-PA)
Ted Weiss (D-NY)
Howard Wolpe (D-MI)

Seven senators who voted for consumers on only 17 percent of votes were named Consumer Zeroes:

Christopher Bond (R-MO)
Jesse Helms (R-NC)
Trent Lott (R-MS)
Richard Lugar (R-IN)
James McClure (R-ID)
Don Nickles (R-OK)
Malcom Wallop (R-WY)

Three House Zeroes voted with consumers only 17 percent of the time or less:

Bob Stump (R-AZ)
Larry Combest (R-TX)
Norman Shumway (R-CA)

(Copies of the 1990 Congressional Voting Record are available from CFA for $10. Non-profit organizations may purchase it for $5.)

- House freshmen Republicans increased their votes in the consumer interest to 54 percent from a 1989 level of 35 percent. Overall, House Republicans favored the consumer 49 percent of the time in 1990, compared with 36 percent in the previous year.
- Democrats continued their strong support for consumers in 1990, improving their Senate record from 64 percent in 1989 to 78 percent in 1990 and their House record from 78 percent to 82 percent.
- Consumer Heroes in the House represent 17 states throughout the nation, with the heaviest representation in the Northeast, upper Midwest, and urban states. Those in the Senate represent 14 states, including an even broader mix of urban and rural states.

All 39 House Heroes and four of the 16 Senate Heroes voted with the consumer on every vote, thereby compiling 100 percent voting records. The four senators earning perfect scores were Brock Adams (D-WA), Albert Gore, Jr. (D-TN), Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA), and John F. Kerry (D-MA).

Representatives and senators with the highest lifetime consumer ratings were also recognized. The 17 lifetime heroes in the Senate are led by Sens. Adams, Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), and Howard Metzenbaum (D-OH), all at 91 percent. The House is led by Rep. Richard Neal (D-MA), with a 100 lifetime rating, followed by Reps. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Kweisi Mfume (D-MD), Nita Lowey (D-NY), and Jim McDermott (D-WA), all with 97 percent lifetime ratings.

The votes covered by CFA's Voting Record include such longstanding consumer issues as: product safety, pollution control, energy conservation, basic banking and check cashing, food safety, anti-discrimination protections, campaign finance reform, and other governmental and corporate reform issues.

Groups Oppose Interstate Branch Banking

A broad-based coalition, including CFA and the American Association of Retired Persons, has formed to fight interstate branch banking provisions in the Treasury Department financial restructuring proposals.

The coalition opposes the proposal on the grounds that it will stimulate further concentration and consolidation in the financial industry, making it easier for international corporations and banks to purchase and control these institutions, while reducing availability of credit and consumer services.

"The problem is that then there will be no way to stop the suction of our deposit dollars out of communities, out of regions, and even out of our country to be lent wherever the highest immediate profit is," wrote CFA Legislative Representative Peggy Miller in an alert to members of Congress.

Other concerns are that the size and power of such a system would make it impossible to regulate, that consumers and small businesses would lose access to credit, and that bank fees would rise, Miller said.

The proposal is being driven in part by Japan and Britain—who have long wanted the system streamlined to make it easier for them to buy and run U.S. banks—and by a handful of large U.S. banks (including Banc One in Ohio, NCNB in North Carolina and Texas, Cal First and Bank America in California, and Citibank in Manhattan), who hope to achieve greater market share through branch bank consolidation.

Proponents of the proposal argue that interstate branch banking would allow for greater efficiency, resulting in cost savings of up to $10 billion, thus improving the financial health of the industry and helping to defray the costs to the Treasury of bank failures.

"No one has been able to offer any statistics, based on current bank consolidations, to support this argument," Miller said. "In fact, our experience has been that current consolidations and branch banking have not resulted in any obvious savings within the banking system and have led to major bank problems."

The largest banks have, in fact, experienced difficulties in finding adequate lending opportunities to match the size of their lending capabilities from pooled deposits, Miller said. When they make poor lending decisions, as many of them have, they can seriously damage the overall economy and cause the Treasury major losses because of the size of their lending portfolios.

"Furthermore, bank fees are high in consolidated banks, and consumer services are scarce. Customer relations are reduced, bank products curtailed, and overall consumer needs go unmet," Miller said.

Consolidation also results in a transfer of decision-making capability from the bank to bank headquarters. "The result is that small businesses and consumers, who previously were able to find adequate credit, are no longer judged individually on their character or their good credit history, but are judged instead on the basis of such impersonal criteria as the constraints of the secondary market or corporate lending policies," Miller said.

"The irony is that this contributes to the excessive economic concentration, and the accompanying lack of good lending opportunities, which has been a primary cause of the banks' ill health," she added.

"Consolidation does not serve the consumer or our economy," she said. "The economy and the health of the banking system are served by diversified, strong local and regional economies; by lending for small and medium sized businesses that create jobs, thus increasing incomes and generating more tax revenues; and by serving consumers' banking needs."

Coalition Seeks Sustainable Ag Funding

The 1990 Farm Bill approved by Congress and signed by the President calls for a major redirection of U.S. Department of Agriculture research to emphasize sustainable agriculture. Yet, USDA's proposed fiscal year 1992 budget contains virtually no funding for these programs.

In response, a coalition of 16 consumer, agriculture, and environmental groups has developed an alternative proposal to the USDA's budget request asking that $138.85 million of the research and development budget be redirected toward sustainable agriculture programs.

"Consumers are outraged that the USDA's R&D programs have continued to foster an environment that imperils food safety and degrades water quality," said CFA Legislative Representative Peggy Miller, who represents CFA on the coalition.

The coalition proposal would establish various new programs, department-wide, that would redirect research funds to support interdisciplinary sustainable agriculture research, develop a broad-scale extension agent training program in sustainable agriculture techniques, beef up basic and applied research on sustainable agriculture, encourage marketing systems that support organic and resource-conserving crops, establish the organic certification program, and set up a new cross-disciplinary team framework to analyze the overall impacts of USDA research, called ISTAP.

"Congress sent a clear message last year that we need to begin shifting our agricultural system away from the heavy use of pesticides and other chemicals and toward an approach that conserves water supply and quality, promotes food safety, and protects our natural resource base," Miller said.

"Recognizing that the institutional structures of our research, extension, and marketing systems are three of the biggest impediments to such a shift, these proposals are designed to help speed that transformation," she said.

Recommended budget increases would be funded by redirecting some of the $1.6 billion in funding for research and education included in the administration request. The coalition does not recommend funding the proposals from sources outside the science and education budget.

In late February, the coalition began meeting with agriculture appropriations committee staff members in an effort to build support for their proposals and find sponsors for the various provisions.

"Last year Congress passed the most environmentally significant Farm Bill ever. Now Congress must use its funding authority to ensure that USDA carries out Congress's wishes and makes this an effective program," Miller said.

In addition to CFA, the coalition includes American Farmland Trust, Center for Rural Affairs, Center for Science in the Public Interest, Consumers Union, Environmental Defense Fund, Friends of the Earth, Institute for Alternative Agriculture, National Family Farm Coalition, National Farmers Union, Natural Resources Defense Council, National Wildlife Federation, Public Voice for Food and Health Policy, Rodale Institute, Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, and Sierra Club Agriculture Committee.

Consumers Support Credit Unions

In late February, more than 12,000 credit union members and officials rallied on the Mall in Washington, D.C. to support an independent, consumer-oriented credit union system. They were joined by supporting groups, including CFA. During the rally, petitions opposing proposals to move credit unions under the banking system, which contained more than five million signatures, were delivered to Congress.

Coalition Opposes PUHCA Repeal

In February, a coalition of consumer advocates, environmentalists, regulators, and electric utilities announced their opposition to legislation that would effectively repeal the Public Utility Holding Company Act.

At a Washington, D.C. press conference, they raised objections to Title XV of S. 341, energy legislation introduced by Sen. J. Bennett Johnston (D-LA), Chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. This provision would amend the Public Utility Holding Company Act (PUHCA) to create a new class of independent power producers that would be exempt from the Act.

Most utility-affiliated independent producers would be free from the Act's preacquisition and ongoing review provisions. Those affiliated with the nine registered holding companies still would be subject to ongoing review provisions although free from preacquisition review. The preacquisition review provisions of the Act are designed to prevent the emergence of holding company structures harmful to consumers.

At the press conference, CFA Executive Director Stephen Brobeck explained that the legislation would jeopardize consumer interests in several ways. It would allow utilities to spin off generating facilities and receive compensation a second time.

"Ratepayers have already paid for many of these facilities and should not have to pay again," Brobeck said.

Also, the legislation makes no provision to ensure that a new field of activity is pro-competitive. It does not stipulate competition as a condition of exception from the law.

Finally, the legislation makes no provision for improved consumer protection, which is badly needed. Under the current law, the most irresponsible ownership forms, such as limited partnerships, have become loopholes of choice. As a result, large utilities dominate exempt power producers, and abusive self-dealing could become widespread. The legislation does nothing to address these problems.

Among those voicing opposition to the legislation at the press conference was CFA Executive Committee member Larry Hobart, Executive Director of the American Public Power Association. In a written statement, William A. Spratley, Ohio Consumers' Counsel, asserted that the legislation would "dramatically reduce the protections for consumers that PUHCA ensures."

Telephone Policy Debate Heats Up

The debate over how the telephone industry should be configured is expected to come to a head this year, with decisions pending both in Congress and in U.S. District Court.

At issue is whether, or how, restrictions that prohibit the seven regional Bell operating companies from offering information services and manufacturing telecommunications equipment should be lifted.

The Bell companies argue that the restrictions must be lifted in order to make it profitable for them to deploy the fiber optic cable they claim is essential to keep the U.S. telecommunications industry internationally competitive.

Opponents, including consumer groups and state regulators, argue that lifting the restrictions would only increase already rampant ratepayer abuses, such as cross-subsidization, that inevitably would result in higher costs for basic voice service.

"There is not a police force large enough to prevent them from overcharging themselves, favoring themselves, and discriminating against other potential competitors," said CFA Legislative Director Gene Kimmelman.

Judge Greene to Reconsider Information Services Ban

U.S. District Judge Harold H. Greene will rule, possibly as early as this spring, on whether to remove, continue, or partially lift the information services ban.

Greene, who upheld the ban in 1987, citing the Bell companies' continuing monopoly control of local phone service, must reevaluate that decision on the basis of a more lenient standard, whether it is in the public interest to keep the Bell companies out of information services.

How the information services debate moves forward in Congress—and in the courts—will depend on how Judge Greene rules.

House Telecommunications and Finance Subcommittee Chairman Edward J. Markey (D-MA), for example, is waiting for the ruling before moving a comprehensive package addressing the broad range of telecommunications policy issues.

Senate Commerce Committee Chairman Ernest F. Hollings (D-SC), meanwhile, is

pushing forward with legislation to remove the ban on manufacturing. In March, the Commerce Committee approved the bill 18-1.

CFA opposes the legislation in its current form on the grounds that it "fails to protect telephone ratepayers against significant rate increases that would likely occur if the Bell telephone companies are allowed to manufacture telecommunications equipment for their own local telephone networks."

Because the Bell companies continue to possess bottleneck control over monopolistic local service markets, they would have a financial incentive to purchase overpriced network equipment from an affiliated manufacturing operation, Kimmelman explained.

"Since ratepayers have no alternative provider of local phone service, they would be required to pay excessive local rates to finance the monopoly profits of an unregulated Bell manufacturing operation," he said.

Furthermore, if the Bell companies were allowed to manufacture and purchase equipment from themselves, they could drive many small manufacturers out of business and generally impede competition in the equipment market.

"By developing equipment with insider knowledge of their own network growth projections, configuring their networks to make equipment uniquely suited for their specific infrastructure design, and by spreading research and development or other untraceable costs into the regulated ratebase, the Bell companies could easily circumvent the most diligent regulatory policing and foreclose major equipment markets from competition," Kimmelman said.

Ratepayer Abuses Cited

Meanwhile, mounting examples of ratepayer abuses by the Bell companies have provided some of the most convincing arguments against lifting the bans.

The most dramatic example involves U.S. West Inc., which in February agreed to pay $10 million—the largest fine ever levied against one defendant by the Justice Department's Antitrust Division—for a series of violations of the consent decree, including providing prohibited information services and undercutting competitor prices.

This prompted Sen. Larry Pressler (R-SD), the only member of the Commerce Committee to oppose the manufacturing bill, to request U.S. West to provide the committee with extensive information about the violations, since it "may have a direct bearing on the legislation being considered."

"A fundamental premise of that legislation is that adequate antitrust safeguards can be built into statutory language, thus permitting the modification or removal of the line of business restrictions," Sen. Pressler wrote in his February 26 letter to U.S. West.

"If we cannot adequately police the relatively bright lines set forth in the consent decree, there will be much less enthusiasm for blurring these lines through legislation to partially remove line of business restrictions," he added.

The following are among other recent cases of ratepayer abuses by Bell operating companies:

- The Michigan Public Service Commission has accused Ameritech of buying $8.3 million worth of land, buildings, equipment, and licenses for its unregulated mobile paging subsidiary for just $3.6 million from Michigan Bell Telephone Company, also an Ameritech subsidiary. Although Michigan Bell ratepayers were left to pick up the $4.7 million difference, a state appeals court has ruled that the utilities commission does not have jurisdiction since the paging subsidiary is unregulated.
- A federal grand jury has indicted Nynex on a criminal contempt charge for providing computerized information services in violation of the consent decree.
- According to an audit released by public service commission staff from states in the BellSouth region, that company has failed to account for $400 million in Yellow Pages revenues that should have been passed on to ratepayers.
- And regulators in several states have found that the Bell companies have improperly charged ratepayers for millions of dollars of federal lobbying costs, in violation of federal regulations that those costs be borne by shareholders.

Consumer Mobilization Needed

Despite these important consumer concerns about the Bell companies, the Senate appears poised to support Sen. Hollings' effort to lift the manufacturing restriction.

"To prevent this anti-consumer bill from becoming law, consumers must begin letting their senators know how they feel about lifting the manufacturing restriction," Kimmelman concluded.

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Bills Protect Airline Ticketholders

Bills have been introduced in both houses of Congress that would require the airline industry to develop a mechanism to ensure that consumers who hold tickets on financially troubled airlines receive full refunds should the airline go bankrupt or cease operations.

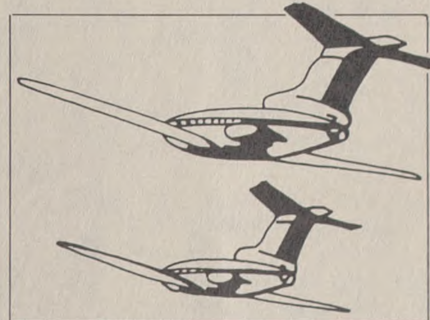
More than 160 airlines have gone bankrupt or terminated service since deregulation, most recently Eastern Airlines, which ceased operations in January.

A 1987 CFA study established that, as a group, consumers are among the largest creditors of these airlines, in the form of unused, prepaid tickets.

The legislation (H.R. 66, S. 240) was introduced by Rep. Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY) in the House, with the support of Rep. Robert A. Roe (D-NJ), Chairman of the Public Works and Transportation Committee, and by Sen. Nancy Kassebaum (R-KS) in the Senate.

It would require the airlines to develop a plan, to be implemented by the Department of Transportation, to ensure that consumers holding tickets on bankrupt airlines get their money back.

Should the industry fail to develop an acceptable plan, the Secretary of Transportation would be required to develop a plan. All major carriers—those operating aircraft capable of seating 60 or more



passengers—would be required to participate.

"The airline industry is unique in its demand of 100 percent up-front payment in return for no guarantee of service at all," Rep. Boehlert said. "Unfortunately, consumers are held hostage to events completely out of their control when an airline goes out of business suddenly."

"When you make tickets fully refundable, you also make them fungible—other airlines will be glad to honor them, because they know they'll be paid for," said CFA Research Director Mark Cooper, participating in a news conference in support of the legislation.

Events associated with the Eastern bankruptcy underscored the need for this kind of industry-wide approach, Cooper added. Although the airline established a $50 million trust fund to compensate passengers, it quickly became clear that this was designed "not for the purpose of consumer protection, but rather to give the airline enough credibility to keep consumers buying tickets," he said.

The fund did not cover tickets bought prior to bankruptcy, and, had the fund proved inadequate to cover all tickets, consumers would have had no recourse, he added.

The Air Transport Association, which opposes the legislation, has proposed as an alternative that consumers use credit cards to purchase their airline tickets, with credit card companies insuring the purchase.

"There's no reason that airlines should turn credit card companies into insurance companies," Cooper said. "Such an approach would raise the costs for all credit card holders."

Further, since credit card companies are "legally required to make good only on purchases that have not yet been paid for," and since consumers increasingly pay for tickets far in advance in order to secure price savings, such a system would not offer effective protection, he said.

Battle Rejoined on Cable Reregulation

The battle over cable television reregulation, which occupied much of the 101st Congress, has been rejoined in the 102nd, with proponents moving early for passage of reregulation legislation.

In the Senate, S. 12, the "Cable Television Consumer Protection Act of 1991," was one of the first pieces of legislation introduced this year. Among its original sponsors are: Sen. John C. Danforth (R-MO), ranking Republican on the Senate Commerce Committee; Commerce Committee Chairman Ernest F. Hollings (D-SC); and Communications Subcommittee Chairman Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI).

In addition, Sens. Joseph I. Lieberman (D-CT) and Howard O. Metzenbaum (D-OH) have each introduced bills containing even stronger consumer protections, S. 211 and S. 432 respectively.

S. 12 is very similar to legislation that was reported out of the Senate Commerce Committee 18-1 last year, only to be killed on the floor by an administration-backed filibuster threat in the last days of the session.

At a March hearing on the bill before the Consumer Subcommittee, CFA Legislative Director Gene Kimmelman said such legislation "is needed to curb cable industry excesses and correct flaws in the 1984 Cable Act."

Among other things, the bill would:

- ensure reasonable charges for installation, rental equipment, and a basic tier consisting of at least the networks, an independent, and a PBS station;
- provide full regulatory protection against unreasonable prices for the most popular package of cable services, including ESPN, CNN, and the other Turner Networks;
- establish balanced federal and local authority over cable customer service;
- guarantee access to cable programming for satellite dish users who, in general, have no other method of receiving a broad package of video services;
- expand access to cable programming for potential cable competitors, such as wireless cable and K-band direct broadcast satellite, to promote video competition;
- direct the FCC to prohibit vertically integrated cable companies from favoring their affiliates or discriminating against potential competitors through inappropriate contractual arrangements, such as refusal to deal or conditioning carriage on a financial interest in programming;
- direct the FCC to prevent cable companies from impeding competition by expanding horizontally to the point of concentrating market power through controlling access to a large percentage of cable subscribers; and
- require cable operators to lease channels to third parties at fair and reasonable rates, terms, and conditions.

Cable rates rose about 13 percent last year alone, more than twice the rate of inflation and more than three times the level of increase experienced during the time when cable was regulated.

CFA Legislative Director Gene Kimmelman, who called on Congress to restrain monopoly abuses by the cable television industry.

These price hikes follow the 40 percent basic rate increases experienced by cable consumers during the first three years of cable deregulation.

"With neither competition nor regulation to police their behavior, cable operators have no reason to dampen their enthusiasm for double-digit rate inflation every year," Kimmelman said.

Because the Federal Communications Commission and local officials are allowed to regulate only those tiers of cable service that include over-the-air broadcast networks, cable companies need only move their most popular programming off that broadcast tier to avoid regulation. The vast majority of cable companies have done just that.

"If Congress agrees with CFA that cable companies should not be allowed to charge monopolistic prices for any cable programming, regardless of tier, it is obvious that legislation, and not FCC action under the 1984 Act, is needed to protect consumers," Kimmelman said.

Kimmelman also discounted the cable industry's argument that over-the-air networks, video rental stores, and movie theatres provide adequate competition. "This is like saying that bicycles compete with cars," he said.

"If consumers want a broad package of television programming in addition to the over-the-air broadcast networks, there is only one way to get it: from cable," he said. "If consumers want to see their elected representatives on C-Span, watch a full range of sports on ESPN, or see news all day on CNN, they must purchase cable."

Since there is no effective competition or regulation in today's market, cable companies can pad their rates without fear of losing customers.

"S. 12 would put an end to cable's monopolistic practices by promoting competitive alternatives to cable while reimposing regulation until those alternatives develop," he said.

"Although this legislation will not eliminate all concerns about inappropriate cable industry practices, it would protect consumers against unreasonable rates and poor service while promoting increased competition."

Indoor Air Quality Bills Introduced

Comprehensive indoor air quality legislation was introduced in both houses of Congress in February. Both bills are supported by CFA.

The Senate bill (S. 455) was introduced jointly by Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-ME); Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), Chairman of the subcommittee with jurisdiction; and ranking Republican on the Environment and Public Works Committee Sen. John Chafee (R-RI).

It is identical to legislation passed unanimously by the Senate in September 1990 and therefore is expected to move quickly through the Senate this year.

In the House, where indoor air legislation languished last year in part because of its referral to three separate subcommittees, Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy II (D-MA) has introduced a revised version of the legislation.

Both bills;

- establish a federal research program on indoor air, including a technology demonstration program and an assessment of indoor air quality in schools;
- require the Environmental Protection Agency to establish health advisories, written in plain English, on the most common and potentially harmful indoor air contaminants;
- create a grants program to assist states in developing management strategies and response programs; and
- expand the authority of the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health to conduct assessments of "sick buildings."

The House bill also: requires the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to set standards for indoor air pollutants in the workplace; requires certain products to carry labels designating the emission rates of indoor air contaminants; prohibits the importation of unlabeled toxic products; and calls for establishment of ventilation standards for all new public and commercial buildings, stipulating a ratio of fresh to stale air in every room.

The Senate bill authorizes $48.5 million a year through 1996 to support the program. The House authorizes $53.5 million.

"We are extremely optimistic that this will be the year that we see passage of indoor air legislation," said CFA Product Safety Director Mary Ellen Fise. "While the House bill was again referred to three committees, we believe that the legislation's early introduction and broad consumer, health, and labor support will help in obtaining early consideration and movement in the House."

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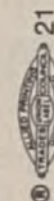

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