

I am writing today to support the merger between Echostar and GM Hughes. I understand the concerns that the merger will eliminate one competitor from the satellite television market, however, I do not feel that this concern is enough to warrant federal regulator's failure to approve the merger. The pay-television market is not a necessity of American life, and I feel therefore should not be subject to overly extensive scrutiny. The bottom line is that for a long time I was at the mercy of my local cable company, I had to pay what they asked for whatever package(s) they offered me, no negotiation, no competition. At least the onset of satellite TV has provided competition for the cable TV providers, in that now I at least have an option. The cost of cable television had risen consistently over the years, without any noticeable improvement in service and/or quality of television provided. Only recently have the cable companies begun to expand service, improve packages offered, and reigned in the price increases. I believe this is due in a large part to the competition provided by satellite TV. The majority of consumers in this country have the option of a single cable TV provider, or 1 of 2 satellite TV providers. Decreasing this option to a single cable TV provider and a single satellite TV provider will not in reality change very much. It will only benefit the end consumer by allowing the satellite provider to make use of economies of scale and reduce their cost and/or improve service, thereby setting the bar higher for both types of services. The cable TV providers have enjoyed local monopolies for a very long time, and are obviously worried about the financial impacts of losing those local monopolies, otherwise they would not be paying lobbyists and/or lawyers to fight the merger. This should tell you something. As far as the rural customer who does not have access to cable TV goes, the merger does essentially create a single-source supplier for pay TV for them, but this is no different than the position that everyone else in the US was in before satellite TV emerged (they had one choice, their local cable provider). At least Echostar is offering these people some price protection guarantees, and is opening up the possibility of service to some individuals who had no option for pay TV before, and will not have any option for pay TV at all if the merger is not approved. The bottom line is that satellite TV is not a right of the American people, it is a luxury, and every American in the US has an option should they not like the satellite TV service offered to them, or the price at which it is offered, and for no American is that option in any way changed should this merger be approved. Again, history has shown that the growth of the satellite TV providers has benefitted Americans in general, so why should that growth be artificially regulated now?