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Time Warner subscribers to lose WisconsinEye coverage

Cable company refuses to pay for coverage

MADISON -- WisconsinEye service to Time Warner Cable will end at midnight Monday, Aug. 31, leaving subscribers without cable access to the nonprofit broadcaster's award-winning public affairs programming.

Chris Long, president and chief executive officer of WisconsinEye, said the private, nonprofit broadcaster has provided its program signal to Time Warner Cable free of charge for more than two years under an interim agreement.

However, WisconsinEye receives no state government funding to support its gavel-to-gavel coverage of the Legislature and other civic programming. Earned revenue from commercial distributors was always a key part of the broadcaster's business plan. More importantly, under the network's 2005 licenses with the state of Wisconsin, WisconsinEye is required to provide its programming to commercial distributors on equal terms and conditions.

A recent, long-term distribution agreement with Charter Communications triggered WisconsinEye's obligation under the terms of its licenses with the state, Long said. Absent a similar agreement with Time Warner, the broadcaster has no choice but to discontinue service to Time Warner on Sept. 1.

"WisconsinEye's licenses with the state require us to offer our signal on equal terms and on a nondiscriminatory and nonexclusionary basis," Long said. "That makes it impossible for us to continue to provide our programming and signal to Time Warner until they sign the same sort of agreement we have with Charter Cable."

Representatives from both WisconsinEye and Time Warner have been in discussion throughout the summer, but failed to reach an agreement in time to avoid the required termination of service.

“We regret having to take this action,” Long said. “Our job is to provide the citizens of Wisconsin with a window on their government and our state’s public life, including the rich variety of civic activity in the communities served by Time Warner Cable. Time Warner’s decision shuts that window for their subscribers and we can only hope that upon reflection they will decide to continue working with us so that the window can be re-opened.”

Since its launch in mid-2007, the network has covered more than 1,200 hours of legislative proceedings, all freely available on demand at www.wiseye.org. State leaders have credited WisconsinEye with establishing a convenient way for people in all parts of the state to access government decision-making and gain insight into the state’s executive, legislative and judicial processes.

Under WisconsinEye’s seven-year agreement with the Wisconsin Legislature, the network records all Senate and Assembly floor sessions, many legislative committee meetings, all Supreme Court oral arguments and executive branch events in their entirety and without commentary through 70 digital camera locations inside the state Capitol.

WisconsinEye broadcasts on Charter Cable Channel 995 and Time Warner subscribers may continue to access coverage via the Internet at www.wiseye.org.

WisconsinEye, a private, nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation, is unique among the more than two dozen C-SPAN-inspired state networks in that it receives no direct or indirect state support, thus ensuring its editorial independence. In addition to funding from foundations, organizations and corporations, WisconsinEye is supported by fees from commercial distributors and plans to add program sponsorships to its revenue base. For more information, visit www.wiseye.org.