

Cable Competition Bill Passes

Blagojevich's signature needed before measure becomes law

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STATE CAPITOL BUREAU

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Legislation on its way to Gov. Rod Blagojevich would create thousands of jobs and attract \$1 billion in new investments while encouraging competition in Illinois' cable TV and video-services market, supporters said Tuesday.

Still unknown, however, is whether Blagojevich intends to sign Senate Bill 678 into law. A spokeswoman for the governor said the bill is "under review."

The proposal, the product of months of negotiations, would make it easier for telephone companies such as AT&T to offer video services that compete with cable television offerings.

One part of the legislation would replace the existing franchise-authorization process, which requires cable and video providers to negotiate franchise agreements with every municipality they want to serve. Instead, the Illinois Commerce Commission would administer a new statewide franchise-authorization process - in essence, creating a one-stop shop for companies that want to offer video services.

The Senate on Tuesday voted 54-0 for the bill, which the House earlier approved, 113-0.

Sen. James Clayborne, the Belleville Democrat who was the bill's Senate sponsor, said it would spur competition in the video market and ensure that consumers are protected.

The consumer-driven provisions in the bill include a requirement that companies offering video services must give customers a 30-day notice before raising rates.

Also, standard installations must be completed within seven business days after an order is placed.

The new entrants in the video-services market would need to install infrastructure capable of delivering their products, and that would create jobs, Clayborne said.

Only Verizon, another telephone company, publicly opposed the final version of the legislation, saying it would not ease the entry of other companies into the video-services market.

While lawmakers generally praised the bill, some also have cautioned that consumers should not expect too much, too soon. During House debate last month, Rep. Fred

Crespo, D-Hoffman Estates, said: “Our constituents need to understand that competition is not going to happen overnight.”

If enacted into law, SB 678 would expire in 2013. Lawmakers included the expiration date because they want to monitor the development of competition in the industry, said Rep. James Brosnahan, D-Evergreen Park, the bill’s House sponsor.

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States Largest Telecom Union to Gain Thousands of New Jobs

Illinois Senate Bill 678 Passes in Springfield, Cable Competition on the Way

(Chicago, IL) – The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local Union 21 is pleased to report that Illinois Senate Bill 678 (SB 678) overwhelmingly passed today by a vote of 54-0. Once the Governor signs the Bill into law, this important legislation will add thousands of new union jobs at AT&T in Illinois. In addition, Illinois consumers will benefit by having a real choice of providers with the new cable competition.

Ronald Kastner, President-Business Manager of IBEW Local 21 in Illinois and NW Indiana said, “Passage of this bill puts Illinois on the leading edge of making change in this country of ours, by growing jobs and sparking competition.” Kastner continued, “Our organization supported this legislation because it is great for Illinois consumers, brings almost a billion dollars into the States economy, and will create good union jobs that support Illinois families.”

Passage of SB 678 is the first step in modernizing Illinois telecommunications laws to take account of the greater possibilities and the far reaching benefits of competition. The bill grants state-wide operating authority to new video providers, allows competition to develop to the greatest extent possible, and ensures that all technologies face a level playing field.

Over 500 telecom workers converged on the State Capitol on April 24, 2007 to gain support for legislation that eventually became SB 678. Traveling from every corner of Illinois, members of IBEW Local Union 21 traveled by car and bus, using the opportunity to contact and lobby their own legislators to pass new Cable and Video Competition Law. Photos of the April 24th event are available at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjJCEw3kJHE&mode=related&search=&v2>

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Background

Local Union 21 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW – an affiliate of the AFL-CIO) is made up of 11,200 members working mostly in Illinois and NW Indiana. Working under dozens of contracts, Local Union 21 members largely work in skilled jobs in the telecommunications industry. IBEW Local Union 21, headquartered in Downers Grove, IL, is the largest IBEW communications union in the United States and Canada and the fourth largest local union in the IBEW.

