

Response to Board of Selectmen's Letter Dated May 18, 1982

The issue that has been raised by the selectmen, pornography, is a non-issue to the Cable Advisory Committee.

Because cable television will open up a floodgate of new educational, informational, and entertainment possibilities with the availability of 50 to 70 channels, it's distressing to hear the selectmen's constraints as to what cable TV can't do.

The issue of pornography is a particularly weak subject to try to legislate because no two people agree on an exact definition of the word. To some an "R" rated film is pornographic. To others the depiction of the nude female form is pornographic. Perhaps the selectmen had in mind the type of "X" rated quickie films that are a staple in the "Combat Zone" of downtown Boston?

The Cable Advisory Committee has no wish to delve into the meaning of pornography and feels it has no business arbitrating the tastes of the people of Sudbury... or better put, the adults of Sudbury.

The young people of Sudbury, however, are a different matter. We recognize that some of the material on the entertainment channels will be somewhat racier than many parents would wish their children to view. To that end we have discussed and agreed that any cable customer will have a positive locking device to go with their sets which will enable parents to control what the young people can or cannot see. This, after all, is where the responsibility should lie...not with the selectmen or the committee.

The word "pornography" has never been used in any of our discussions. But crystallizing our resolve on this freedom of speech issue was the following: Knowing that a great deal of the movie fare was "R" rated, as much of the movie fare in the local theatres is "R" rated, a seemingly innocuous question was asked of one of the applicants. (To paraphrase...)

Q. Would you in the present or in the future offer to Sudbury subscribers the Playboy channel? ("R" rated films)

A. No. We don't feel the Playboy channel is the proper kind of programming for the people of Sudbury.

Although there was no immediate discussion on this colloquy, it was reported later in an informal meeting with our local clergymen. Although not expressing any endorsement of Playboy, they appeared equally shocked that an outside firm would decide what "is proper for the people of Sudbury."

And we feel equally determined in our resolve that no outsiders, whether they be selectmen or applicants, should have a voice in the selection of the books in the cable library of our homes.

Our philosophical differences, however, may be moot. The marketplace has a marvelous mechanism for sifting out the many thin offerings which otherwise might upset the self-appointed morally outraged.

This is 1982. And not too far away is 1984, with all the grim reminders of Orwell's 1984. We are discussing an exclusive contract that could last until 1997.

Times change...acceptable customs change...and entertainment fare changes. To be morally outraged at anything today is akin to walking a tightrope in a strong wind, and to impose moral standards other than that which is acceptable to the community is being "Big Brother" in the most undemocratic sense.

The people of Sudbury, we believe, should be the final arbiters of what comes into the privacy of their homes. It should be their free choice. It is their money. We believe strongly that the people of Sudbury will make the right decisions for themselves and their families.

Respectfully submitted,

The Cable Advisory Committee

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