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Statement about pay television

Strom Thurmond

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STATEMENT IN THE SENATE BY SENATOR STROM THURMOND (D-SC) WITH REFERENCE TO
PAY TELEVISION, AUGUST 23, 1957.

MR. PRESIDENT:

I was greatly interested in the remarks (made in the Senate earlier today) by the senior Senator from Michigan with reference to pay television or, as it is sometimes called, toll television, or subscription television.

In my opinion this is a subject which millions of Americans would be much more interested in, if they fully realized the implications in the fact that the Federal Communications Commission has been holding hearings to determine whether it shall authorize tests of pay television service. I do not believe that these millions of Americans who own television sets in their homes want to wake up one morning and find that a new expense has been imposed upon them, in the form of charges for certain television service which is now free.

I want to commend the able Senator from Michigan for declaring his opposition to pay television, and for adding his voice to the growing opposition to subjecting the public to this form of unofficial taxation.

However, I wish to disagree with a statement made by the Senator from Michigan.

He stated that the Federal Communications Commission "has stated that it has jurisdiction in this matter under law and can authorize such a test. Whether or not this is so--and I presume that only the courts finally could decide--the American people certainly have jurisdiction too--and their representation resides in this Congress."

My disagreement with my colleague is on his comment that "only the courts finally could decide" whether the FCC has jurisdiction over pay television proposals.

I do agree with him fully in his next statement that "the American people certainly have jurisdiction too--and their representation resides in this Congress." The fact that the Senator from Michigan expresses any doubt as to where the jurisdiction in this matter lies is sufficient evidence to me that legislation is needed on the subject of pay television.

On June 11 of this year I introduced a bill, S. 2268, in the Senate to prohibit the charging of a fee to view telecasts in the home. The passage of this bill, which is now pending in the Senate Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee, would protect the millions of Americans who bought their television sets to see free television, not to pay for the privilege of viewing programs they wished to see.

Mr. President, I do not believe it would be in the public interest for the Federal Communications Commission to approve any pay television test when there is doubt as to where jurisdiction lies in this matter. I do believe it is incumbent on the Congress to take action in this situation and pass legislation which will clearly define the authority of the Commission and to prohibit the charging of a fee to view telecasts in the home.

The American people deserve such protection against the imposition of a continuing expense/for the privilege of viewing the television programs of their choice.

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