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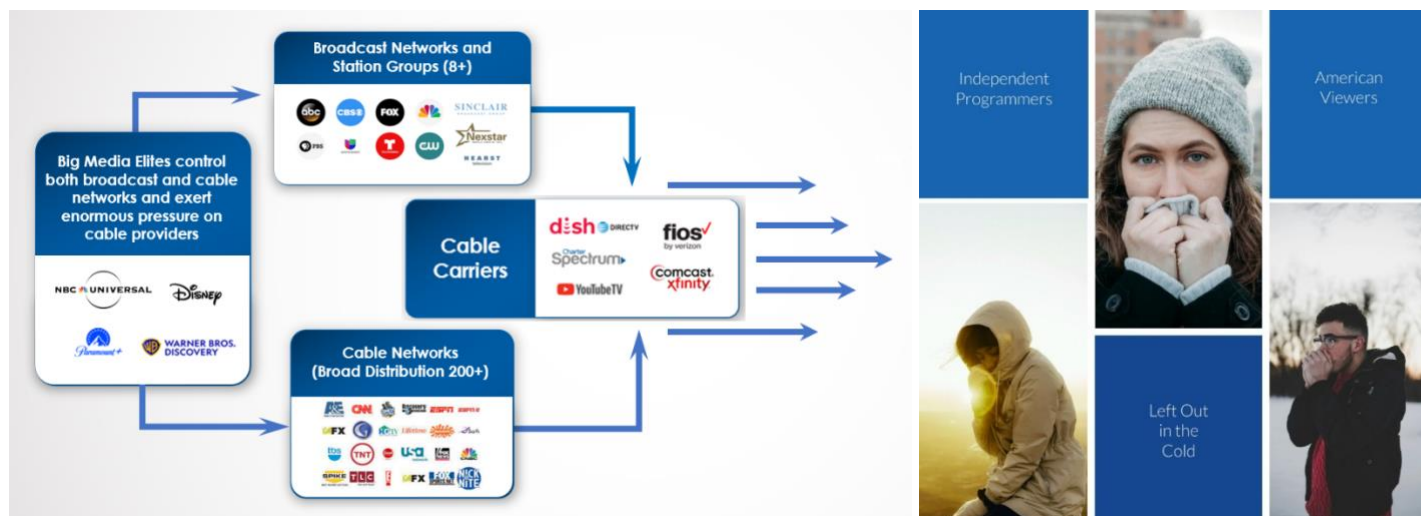
PRINCIPLE: Safeguarding American Values in Media

CAP ISSUE BRIEF #1 Media Choice

American television has become saturated with mono-cultural programming that crowds out independent voices and their values-based content. The integrity of America's families and its electorate requires variety and independent media ownership.

*U.S. TV & VIDEO WILL
BE A \$324 BILLION
MARKET BY 2029.*

No matter the platform, Big Media Elites control virtually all the channels available on Pay TV



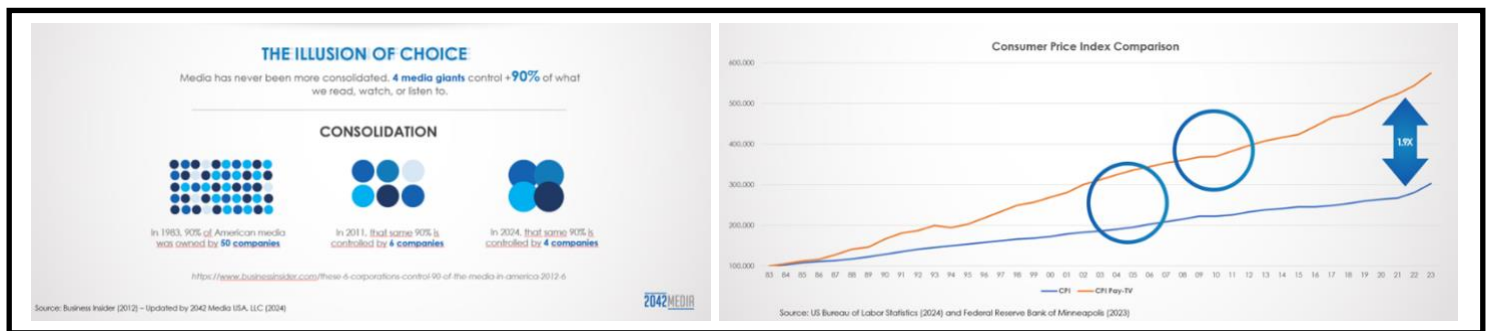
Key Take-Aways

- The US video market is on track to reach **\$324 billion**.
- 4 big programming groups control **85% to 95% of channels** on Pay TV basic packages.
- The cost of Pay TV to Americans has grown at **twice the rate of inflation**.
- Independent, values-based community programming has been **crowded out** of American airwaves.
- Americans are **paying more and getting less** from today's concentrated Pay TV market.
- A **legislative fix** is available to support independently owned and created programming.

Issue Landscape

The U.S. TV & video market is valued at \$289 billion and projected to reach \$324 billion by 2029¹. However, growth has not occurred evenly. In the United States, the TV industry is dominated by a handful of large media companies with 85% to 95% of cable programming controlled by an oligopoly². Independent media ownership and independent content creation have become correspondingly rare. Even as Americans have less access to diverse viewpoints with values-driven content, consumer costs have increased exponentially³. Since 2005, the price of TV has grown at twice the rate of inflation⁴.

Consolidation & Inflation:



A Policy Priority



Alongside a growing abundance of media platforms, TV retains an iconic place in American culture. It is a place where families come together to relax, to bond, to be informed and entertained. It is often where young minds are exposed to new ideas for the first time.

A vibrant, competitive Pay TV industry is a policy priority for the United States per congressional intent in the Telecommunications Act of 1996. For families, too, Pay TV yields a modicum of control over the content children view to parental policy versus the unpredictability of streaming video.

Americans deserve a rich tapestry of TV content that gives voice both to national perspectives and to the local communities in which they are formed. Public policy that accurately reflects the values of all Americans is a policy that enhances opportunities for new and independent voices in media.

¹ <https://www.statista.com/outlook/amo/media/tv-video/united-states>

² In 1980, 50 companies held sway over American media. In 2020 it was 6. In 2025, it's four: Walt Disney Company, Paramount Plus, ComcastNBC and WarnerBros. Discovery - <https://techstartups.com/>

³ Since 2005, revenue per subscriber to 2022 increased 3X (MNTN Research 2022)

⁴ US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024) and Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis (2023)



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Independent programmers are a necessary ingredient of a comprehensive and culturally rich media ecosystem. When the American people enjoy access to a greater variety of new content and providers it creates space for communities of faith, language, and values to thrive. Across the United States, a plethora of audiences both broad and niche are currently denied the in-depth content they deserve, because the prevailing market structure has blocked it out.

Trends turned negative. Pay TV has a great history of creating opportunities for media content. However, consolidation amongst media producers has closed the door to new entrants in programming.

A few traditional media and new online media giants now control the lion's share of content being created and seen by the consumer via traditional television sources. The result: news coverage tilted in one direction increasing the potential for biased coverage; reduced diversity of viewpoints leading to limited consumer choice; higher prices; and specific community audiences being underserved.



Economic considerations matter. Smart policy encourages Pay TV distributors to include or not include an independent channel on its own merits: the programming quality, the audience it serves, the consistency and reliability of management and ownership. The business model of Pay TV is for the consumer to pay the distributor monthly for a curated mix of channels. The distributor then pays a monthly per customer (subscriber) license fee to each channel. Independent channels cannot thrive if they don't benefit from the same economics as the established media companies, meaning independent channels, too, need access to a license fee paid by the distributor. Advertising income, though important, remains a small portion of a Pay TV channel's revenue (from a 3-5% range for independents, up to a reported high of 22% with ESPN⁵). Promising as they would appear, streaming opportunities simply do not provide adequate revenue to sustain channels when they are unable to secure distribution and commensurate licensing fees from cable platforms.

⁵ [SportsBusinessJournalreportDisneyESPN](#).



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A Policy Solution

Ownership is critical. Policy and law that supports independent programming promotes diversity of viewpoints in media. The participation of new and autonomous voices is key. Large media companies have homogenized TV content to the detriment of its quality. Fostering independent media ownership can help correct that problem because competition encourages new ideas.



Consumer access to a diversity of voices and a greater variety of new content providers can only be supplied through competition. If competition is to thrive amidst the vast conglomerates dominating the industry, it is necessary to ensure small and independent programmers have access to subscribers and an opportunity for their content to be seen; an opportunity to compete.

To empower independent networks and enable robust competition in a Pay TV market dominated by a handful of large media companies requires policymakers to level the playing field. Fortunately, competition does not require unhealthy disruption of an entire industry. Creating an incentive for cable and streaming platforms to carry independent programming is a win-win-win for American viewers, independent programmers, and the industry.

A legislative fix is available. Policymakers can encourage Pay TV distributors—both cable/satellite operators and streaming platforms—to open their channel line ups and platforms to competition, new ideas, and independent entrepreneurs through a market-based incentive. In recent years, thought leaders in the U.S. Congress have introduced bipartisan bills designed to remove cost as a barrier to distributing TV channels owned by independent programmers. Using the tax code, and a simple and inexpensive tax incentive, these bills would enable the carriers to offset costs when they elect to carry independent voices. Similar to offsets afforded to American innovators who invest in research and development, the independent programming offset is an investment in American values, culture, and creativity. H.R. 2230⁶, recently reintroduced in the 119th Congress, achieves the following goals:

- Break the monopoly of the big media elites on television content;
- Deliver the diverse points of view necessary for our democracy and family values;
- Fight consolidation and inflation by injecting competition into the market;
- Minimize cost to the taxpayer.

⁶ H.R.2230 - A Bill, To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide tax credits for carriage of independent programmers by certain multichannel video programming distributors (introduced March 18, 2025) - <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/2230>



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Facts and Figures

- The U.S. TV and video market is on track to be worth **\$324 billion** by 2029.
- The US is the **global leader** in creating video content and the platforms that distribute this content.
- American Pay TV is controlled by **media elite programmers** that take up all the space and investments made by cable, satellite & streaming companies. This restricts Americans' access to content.
- A typical Pay TV distributor (aka "cable operator," "satellite," "multichannel video programming distributor," or "MVPD") will carry a pre-determined set of approximately **300 channels** across its suite of programming packages:
 - The packages typically promoted by the MVPD's each start with a uniform channel offering purchased by between 40% to 80% of their customers. These packages include:
 - traditional 'cable channels' like ESPN, Disney, TBS, Discovery, CNN and Fox News, plus,
 - broadcast channels (national networks like ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox plus local stations), plus,
 - The Pay TV distributor also offers premium channels (e.g., HBO & Showtime); sports packages (i.e. out-of-market NFL, NBA, NHL & NBA games); a la carte international channels; and channels included in specific language packages (e.g., a group of Spanish-only channels).
- **Independent channels are only a small part of Pay TV packages**
 - Legacy Pay TV distributors (i.e., Comcast, DIRECTV, Charter and others) program at most 5-15% of their standard packages with Independent Networks.
 - The vMVPD's offer even less: between zero and 3%.

Other Resources

- [Gus Bilirakis Introduces the Independent Programmers Tax Incentive Act With Support of Florida Reps - Florida Daily](#)
- [Bilirakis, Clarke, Steube and Panetta Bill to Boost Competition in Media](#)
- <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/6072/text>
- <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/5056>
- <https://techstartups.com/2020/09/18/6-corporations-control-90-media-america-illusion-choice-objectivity-2020/>
- <https://www.statista.com/topics/4999/television-industry-worldwide/#topicOverview>
- <https://leichtmanresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/LRG-Press-Release-3-08-2024.pdf>



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Appendix One – Definitions used in this document

Pay TV is a colloquial term that encompasses all platforms for which a consumer pays for access to video. This includes traditional cable TV (MVPDs), streamers that offer customers a cable-like experience (e.g., YouTube TV, Sling, Philo, or Fubo) and other subscription video on demand (SVOD) platforms such as Netflix, Max or Peacock.

MVPD means an entity engaged in the business of making available for purchase, by subscribers or customers, multiple channels of video programming. Such entities include, but are not limited to, a cable operator, a BRS/EBS provider, a direct broadcast satellite service, a television receive-only satellite program distributor, and a satellite master antenna television system operator, as well as buying groups or agents of all such entities.

vMVPD means any person engaged in the trade or business of making available directly to the end user, by means of the Internet or other IP-based transmission path, multiple streams of linear video programming. This definition includes streamers that mirror a ‘cable’ offering, such as Fubo, Hulu, Sling, YouTube TV and Philo.

Eligible Distributor (also ‘Pay TV Distributor’) means an entity made eligible by proposed legislation to benefit from tax credits in conjunction with carriage of independent programming channels. The definition provided in HR 2230 is ‘any person engaged in the trade or business of being a multichannel video programming distributor (“MVPD”).’ The term generally encompasses a ‘cable company’ or ‘cable distributor’ like a Comcast, Cox or Charter, a definition which includes satellite (DIRECTV & DISH) and telco’s such as Frontier and Verizon.

Broad-based Package refers to programming packages offered by Pay TV distributors that reach at least 40% and typically 80% of their customers. The packages on which curated channels are distributed.

Independent Channel means a United States-based person engaged in the production, creation, or wholesale distribution of linear video programming if (i) such person is not a multichannel video programming distributor, virtual multichannel programming distributor, network, or television station company, and (ii) no multichannel video programming distributor, virtual multichannel video programming distributor, network, or television station company has a cognizable interest in such person.

Television Station Company means any person if, after taking into account the audience reach of all television stations under common control with such person, such person has a national audience reach in excess of three percent (3%).



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Appendix Two- Listing of Qualified Distributors

Independent Programmers Navigate a Complex Product and Technology Market		
MVPDs	vMVPDs	SVOD
Comcast - Xfinity	YouTube TV	YouTube
Charter Communications – Spectrum	Hulu Live +TV	Netflix
DirecTV	Sling TV	Disney Plus
DISH Network	Fubo TV	Amazon Prime Video
Verizon FiOS	DirecTV Now	Max
Altice USA	Philo TV	Apple TV Plus
Cox	Frndly	Peacock
Mediacom		Paramount Plus
Breezeline		Discovery Plus
Frontier		
Cable One		



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Appendix Three. Reported Subscriber counts of larger Qualified Distributors.

	MVPD's	Subscribers at end of 2023	Net Adds in 2023
MVPD's	Charter	14,122,000	-1,025,000
	Comcast	14,106,000	-2,036,000
	Altice	2,262,000	-274,300
	Breezeline	280,145	-29,482
	Cable One	142,300	-39,200
	Estimate of Mediacom & Cox Communications	3,140,000	(420,000)
	DIRECTV**	11,300,000	-1,800,000
	DISH TV (DBS)	6,471,000	-945,000
	Verizon Fios (Telco)	3,012,000	-289,000
	Frontier (Telco)^	234,000	-72,000
Total MVPD's		51,929,445	-6,509,982
vMVPD's	Internet-Delivered (vMVPD)		
	YouTube TV^^	8,900,000	1,900,000
	Hulu + Live TV	4,600,000	100,000
	Sling TV	2,055,000	-279,000
	Fubo	1,618,000	173,000
	Philo TV	1,108,000	n/a
	Frndly TV	635,000	n/a
Total Top vMVPD's		18,916,000	1,894,000
Total Top Providers (these providers represent 96% of all US pay TV subscribers)		70,845,445	-4,615,982
	Source: LeichtmanResearch.com		
	* Includes LRG estimates for Cox and Mediacom		
	** LRG estimate, includes DIRECTV, U-verse, and DIRECTV Stream		
	^ Includes LRG estimate for non-residential subscribers		
	^^ LRG revised estimate. On February 6, 2024 the company posted "we have more than 8 million subscribers to YouTube TV"		