



Media Minutes

Show Date: 3-19-10

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TRANSCRIPT

FCC's National Broadband Plan: What's Hot and What's Not

The Federal Communications Commission unveiled its long-awaited National Broadband Plan this week after more than a year of work. FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski called the plan a "21st century roadmap to spur economic growth and investment, create jobs, educate our children, protect our citizens, and engage in our democracy,"

Free Press Policy Director Ben Scott says that the National Broadband Plan makes it clear that broadband is no longer a luxury.

Ben Scott: *Probably the most important symbolic move the FCC made with the broadband plan is for the first time acknowledging that high-speed Internet is no longer an entertainment service -- it is a critical infrastructure in America.*

Scott says that, when you get into the details of the plan, there are many things that the FCC got right.

Ben Scott: *They have developed a pretty detailed plan for transitioning the Universal Service Fund, which is a big government program that subsidizes rural and low-income telephone service today. They want to transition that into broadband and make that subsidy support broadband. They also have an interesting proposal on how to reallocate the public airwaves to make better use of them.*

The agency also plans on improving the way it collects information on broadband prices and speeds, which Scott admits is not very sexy, but will become very important for policymakers. But there are other pressing issues on which the agency punted.

Ben Scott: *The big failure, I think, comes in the lack of a specific plan about how to get prices to come down and speeds to go up so that our networks resemble those of the world leaders in Europe and in Asia. The Commission gets the problem right, but their solution doesn't really tackle the tough questions that would bloody the noses of the big phone and cable companies. They defer those fights to another day.*

Ben Scott: *The bottom line for the broadband plan is that it's a step in the right direction, but the real work is yet to come when we began to implement it and tackle some of these major questions.*

To read the FCC's National Broadband Plan, go to fcc.gov.

Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood Fighting Corporate Power

The Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood works to limit deceptive marketing techniques targeted at kids. They've battled stealth advertising in report cards and on school buses, and marketing schemes such as the one that promoted highly sexualized Bratz dolls at Scholastic book clubs and fairs.

Up until very recently, the campaign was a program of the Judge Baker Children's Center, a Harvard-affiliated children's mental health center in Boston. But the group was evicted from the center after their highly successful -- and highly visible -- fight to get the Walt Disney Company to offer refunds on Baby Einstein videos, which the company had been falsely marketing as educational.

Susan Linn, Executive Director of the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, says that studies have shown that time spent by babies in front of the TV screen actually takes valuable time away from those practices that really do work -- like spending time with loving adults and engaging in creative play.

Susan Linn: *The whole notion of educational baby videos, that watching videos is a good way to teach babies and toddlers language or to help them learn, is just really pretty much a complete and utter scam.*

After the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood filed a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission about Disney's false and deceptive marketing, Disney changed its tactics, but Linn says ...

Susan Linn: *The FTC never held them publicly accountable. So there was no public acknowledgement that they had been deceiving parents. Nor were parent who'd bought the videos, believing they were educational, ever compensated. And so we thought that parents deserved better than that.*

The Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood threatened a class-action suit against Disney, which prompted the company to offer refunds to anyone who had bought the videos in the past five years.

But the victory celebration was short-lived. Under pressure from Disney, Linn's group was told they needed to leave the Judge Baker Center. And they were warned not to speak to the press or do any work that was critical of an individual corporation or product.

Susan Linn: *I'm a psychologist. I really believe that it's the mission of children's health centers to stand up to anybody who may be potentially harming children, no matter how powerful that entity or that person is.*

Susan Linn: *It's chilling that a corporation, you know, especially one that markets itself as family-friendly, would lean on a children's mental health center. And it's just heartbreaking that the Center just kind of caved.*

Three months after being kicked out of Judge Baker, CCFC has found a new home and is gearing up for a national conference in April.

Susan Linn: *We always knew that we were taking on very, very powerful interests. You know, we take on the most powerful corporations in the world. And now we've experienced the ways that we can be hurt by doing that. I will say, however, that it has only made us more determined to carry on our work.*

For more information about the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, go to commercialfreechildhood.org.

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