

say the same for my colleagues on the other side who continue to hold up final passage of this bill.

The Missing, Exploited, and Runaway Children Protection Act of 1999 reauthorizes programs under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act and authorizes funding for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Both programs are critical to our nation's youth and to our nation's well-being.

In addition to providing shelter for children in need, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act ensures that these children and their families have access to important services, such as individual, family or group counseling, alcohol and drug counseling and a myriad of other resources to help these young people and their families get back on track. As the National Network for Youth as stressed, the Act's programs "provide critical assistance to youth in high-risk situations all over the country."

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children provide extremely worthwhile and effective assistance to children and families facing crises across the U.S. and around the world. In 1998, the National Center helped law enforcement officers locate over 5,000 missing children. The National Center serves a critical role as a clearinghouse of resources and information for both family members and law enforcement officers. They have developed a network of hotels and restaurants which provides free services to parents in search of their children and have also developed extensive training programs.

S. 249 should be passed today. There is absolutely no reason to stall on this legislation, but as we get down to the wire to begin August recess, it looks like we will once again face another delay. We will return to our states and to our constituents who run these crucial programs and we will be unable to tell them that we have protected the programs that allow them to ensure children and families access to their services by reauthorizing the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. I am frustrated once again at the inaction of the Republican majority on this matter and believe that The Missing Exploited, and Runaway Children Protection Act should be passed immediately.

INCREASING SATELLITE AND CABLE COMPETITION

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, more than 3 years ago, I started raising serious concerns about the need to increase competition between cable and satellite TV providers and the need to allow satellite dish owners to receive local network stations. I felt then, and I feel now, that the best way to reduce the cable and satellite rate increases and to protect satellite dish owners is to have satellite television compete on a level playing field with cable.

I was thus very pleased when, finally, on May 20, the Senate passed a bill that I sponsored, without objection, which protects satellite dish owners and would offer them more television stations. I worked on this bill with the Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Senator HATCH, and several other Senators.

The bill would restore satellite TV service to those who lost it, and it would prevent thousands of additional cutoffs.

Also, over time, it would permit satellite carriers to offer many more stations to home satellite dish owners. Unfortunately, even though the Senate passed the bill on May 20, we have been unable to set up a Conference with the other chamber. On June 8, the Senate approved the list of Senators—the Conferees—to negotiate the final bill with the House of Representatives.

The August recess is about to start. Thousands of Vermonters, and I am one of them, will continue to get minimal TV service because this bill was not able to be presented to the President for signature. I want to assure Vermonters that I will continue to work to get this bill before the President.

I also have been meeting with satellite company officials representing companies that will be able to offer a whole range of local stations, movie channels, sports, weather, history, PBS, superstations, and the like, to Vermonters via satellite. I want to make sure that Vermonters will be offered the full range of TV service over satellite once we can negotiate the final bill.

I am in the same situation as many Vermonters. At my home in Middlesex, Vermont, I only receive one local network channel clearly with my rooftop antenna.

I was very worried three years ago that satellite dish owners would start losing their ability to receive distant network signals. Unfortunately, my fears have come to pass. Many other Members of Congress have also been concerned about this issue.

The Satellite Home Viewers Improvement Act, S. 247, which I sponsored with the Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Senator HATCH, the Chairman of the Commerce Committee, Senator McCAIN, the ranking member of our antitrust subcommittee, Senator KOHL, and the Majority Leader of the Senate, Senator LOTT, offered the way to promote head-to-head competition between cable and satellite providers—and lower rates and provide more services for consumers.

In November of 1997, we held a full Committee hearing on satellite issues. I agreed with Chairman HATCH to work together on a bill to try to avoid needless cutoffs of satellite TV service while, at the same time, working to protect the local affiliate broadcast system and increase competition.

In March of last year we introduced a bill but were unable to get it to the President for signature. That version was reported out of the Judiciary Committee unanimously on October 1, 1998. That bill, as with the bill I am trying to get to the President's desk this year, was also designed to permit local TV signals, as opposed to distant out-of-state network signals, to be offered to viewers via satellite; to increase competition between cable and satellite TV providers; to provide more PBS programming by also offering a national feed as well as local programming; and to reduce rates charged to consumers.

In the midst of all these legislative efforts, a federal district court judge in Florida found that PrimeTime 24 was offering distant CBS and Fox television signals to more than one million households in the U.S. in a manner inconsistent with its compulsory license that allows them to offer distant network signals. This development further complicated the situation.

Under a preliminary injunction, the satellite service of CBS and Fox networks was to be terminated on October 8, 1998 for thousands of households in Vermont and other states who had signed up after March 11, 1997, the date the action was filed.

I was pleased that we worked together in the Senate Judiciary Committee to avoid these immediate cutoffs of satellite TV service in Vermont and other states. The parties agreed to request an extension which was granted until February 28, 1999. This extension was also designed to give the FCC time to address this problem faced by satellite dish owners.

In December, I sent a comment to the FCC and criticized their proposals on how to define the "white area"—the area not included in either the Grade A or Grade B signal intensity areas. My view was that the FCC proposal would cut off households from receiving distant signals based on "unwarranted assumptions" in a manner inconsistent with the law and the clear intent of the Congress. I complained about entire towns in Vermont which were to be inappropriately cut off when no one could receive signals over the air.

The Florida district court filed a final order which also required that households signed up for satellite service before March 11, 1997, be subject to termination of CBS and Fox distant signals on April 30, 1999, if they lived in areas where they are likely to receive a grade B intensity signal and are unable to get the local CBS or Fox affiliate to consent to receipt of the distant signal.

In the meantime, further Court and other developments have resulted in cutoffs of thousands of satellite dish owners. This situation is unacceptable, and I will continue to work to fix this problem.