

## Community Television Bill Fails Just Short of a Vote

We did not have the votes to win this session.

We are not giving up, however.

The Save Our Community Television bill got much farther than ANYONE ever thought it could this session, making it through the committee process in both houses with bi-partisan votes, but losing steam when the votes were informally counted. We were coming up just short in the Senate and there was a significant gap in the Assembly. Representative Mike Sheridan (D - Janesville) referred AB721 to the Joint Finance Committee, but the committee did not take it up, due to the Democratic leadership's belief that the measure did not have the votes to win on the floor.

We would like to single out for praise Representative Gary Hebl, the author of AB721 and a true champion, who worked tirelessly to gain passage of a remedial bill for PEG. His aides, Traci Bussan and Kate Battiato, in particular, worked unbelievably hard on this issue. On the Senate side, our champion, as always, was Senator Kathleen Vinehout and her aide, Joel Nilsestuen. We are very, very lucky to have such capable legislators understand the value of having a public forum on television and the unique contribution community television makes to build our communities. We are sincerely grateful.

While community television benefits all communities across Wisconsin, whether Democratic-leaning or Republican-leaning, we only succeeded in gaining the support of three Republican legislators: Representative Garey Bies of Sturgeon Bay, Representative Richard Spanbauer of the Town of Algoma, and Senator Mike Ellis of Neenah. We would like to publicly thank these legislators for their support. The opposition of the Republican Party to this measure meant that we needed nearly every Democratic vote to succeed. In the Assembly, Democrats control by a margin of just six votes (52 to 46 and 1 independent) and in the Senate, Democrats control by a margin of three. While WAPC is a strong organization representing 60 communities, many communities simply do not have community television and we were unable to get through to these legislators.

We are also up against an industry that has had a long relationship with the state legislature. AT&T has virtually unlimited resources and registered 15 lobbyists this session. (Many for the [telephone deregulation bill](#) being considered today in the Assembly that would strip the PSC of any ability to regulate the price and condition of basic telephone infrastructure in the state and it is expected to pass). The Wisconsin Cable Communications Association registered 4 lobbyists and represents a couple of the largest cable companies in the nation -- Time Warner and Charter. This all translates into a daunting and formidable level of influence.

We will continue to fight for public space on cable television.

WAPC would like to thank the wonderful organizations, who work tirelessly every day on behalf of Wisconsin residents and registered and lobbied for the bill: AFSCME, the Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups, the Citizens Utility Board, Wisconsin Alliance of Cities, the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, the Wisconsin League of Women

Voters, Citizen Action, the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, the Communication Workers of America Locals 4603 and 4622, the Madison Metropolitan School District, and the Dane County Cities and Villages Association.

To represent your interests successfully in the state legislature, they need your attention, your participation, and your financial support.

In addition, the following city councils passed resolutions in favor of this bill: Columbus, De Pere, Eau Claire, Fitchburg, Hartford, Hudson, Jefferson, Madison, Middleton, Milwaukee, North Hudson, Oak Creek, Park Ridge, Rice Lake, Stevens Point, Sturgeon Bay, Sun Prairie, Watertown, Wausau, and the County of Eau Claire. We appreciate the work and time of all the hometown leaders who supported and pressed for passage.

WAPC would also like to thank all of the individuals who have worked to support community television. Your letters, phone calls, and faxes provided the impetus that got us far along in the process. With your help, WAPC will work to prepare the ground for the next session of the Wisconsin State Legislature that begins next January. Watch for news and ways you can participate in community television in upcoming monthly issues of the **Wisconsin Community Television Times**.