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Congress poised to let satellite companies beam local stations

Change could increase competition with cable

From Correspondent Wolf Blitzer

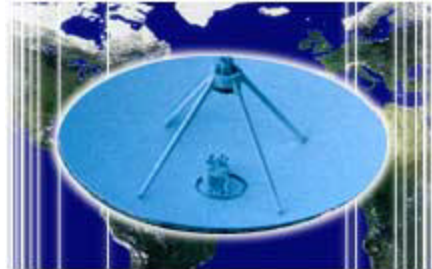
October 30, 1999

Web posted at: 11:58 p.m. EDT (0358 GMT)

WASHINGTON --

(CNN) --

Congressional negotiators are close to an agreement clearing the way for direct satellite television companies to beam local broadcast stations to customers, CNN has learned.



Until now, consumers who chose satellite television service had to receive their local stations from either an over-the-air antenna or through basic cable service, giving cable companies an advantage over satellite companies in attracting customers.

Supporters of the change argue that it will make satellite service more attractive and benefit consumers by increasing competition for cable companies.

A congressional source tells CNN that House and Senate negotiators have "reached a tentative agreement on all the major points" of the bill. The legislation is expected to clear both houses of Congress before they recess in November.

Satellite companies should be able to start offering

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local stations in major markets next year, with service in small markets phased in over coming years, sources say.

Both the top Republican and Democrat on the House telecommunications subcommittee handling the bill -- Reps. Billy Tauzin (R-Louisiana) and Edward Markey (D- Massachusetts) -- support the measure, as does the White House.



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