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**Liberal MP urges probe of CRTC Blasts regulator for 'hijacking' rate reductions**

By Robert Brehl TORONTO STAR

A Liberal MP has accused the federal broadcast regulator of misleading Canadians on "hidden" cable taxes.

"This is wholly and absolutely contemptuous," Dan McTeague, who represents the Whitby-area riding of Ontario, said yesterday.

He was reacting to a Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission news release in which the commission denied there are "hidden" cable taxes amounting to \$1.1 billion over the next five to seven years.

"The CRTC may think they're arm's length from Parliament and the people, but they've demonstrated they're not at arm's length from the cable companies," McTeague said.

Earlier this week, consumer advocate **Keith Mahar** accused the commission and cable companies of playing footsie to prevent cable subscribers from receiving rate rebates of about \$4 a month.

Those rebates were scheduled to have begun last Jan. 1.

But two years ago the commission decided to scrap the rebate plan. Instead, half the money consumers would have saved was put in a Canadian programming fund and the rest was returned to the cable industry to help pay for new technology.

The commission maintains the public was consulted and nothing was hidden.

In an interview, McTeague called the commission's response both "pious" and "insulting" to ordinary Canadians.

"People have a right not to pay. But they were not truly consulted or made aware of the money grab," said McTeague, who also appeared at Mahar's news conference with two other MPs.

In a news release issued yesterday, McTeague pulled no punches and called for a full review of the commission, its methods and its accountability to average Canadians.

"The CRTC has been playing fast and loose with the money of Canadian cable subscribers for some time and now they are doing the same with the truth," McTeague said in the release.

"The money grab by the CRTC and the cable TV companies is indeed hidden because . . . Canadians do not know that their rate reductions have been hijacked by revised CRTC regulations," McTeague said.

The commission said it is required under the Broadcasting Act to balance the interests of consumers, cable companies and the creative community.

"Inevitably, and taken in isolation, some decisions can be made to appear to favor one group over another," the commission said in its statement about Mahar's accusations.

The regulator added that the heart of the mandate as defined by the act is to nurture "the production and distribution of more and better Canadian programming."

The commission also said the decision to cancel the rate cut was made after a televised hearing that considered 836 oral and written submissions.

Commission officials did not return calls for comment on McTeague's news release.

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