

**THE TORONTO STAR**

The Toronto Star

NEWS, Sunday, July 9, 1995, p. A1

Cable TV firms get \$300m windfall 'Goliath' Rogers faces court battle with 'David'

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Cable subscribers are paying \$2.52 a month, plus PST and GST, more than they should for basic service.

And, thanks to a decision by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, they'll keep on paying - \$177.60 per customer over the next five years.

The result is a \$300 million fund to promote the production of cable television programs and a \$300 million windfall for the cable companies.

Among the biggest winners? Rogers Cablesystems, which stands to gain up to \$51,275,961 without doing a thing for it.

"We're following what the law tells us to do," Rogers vice-chair Phil Lind told The Star. "Like we always do, we follow CRTC procedures."

But a Toronto man, **Keith Mahar**, hopes to stop the flow of what he terms "free money" to Rogers.

He's the consumer David to the Rogers cable giant.

And he's taking the fight to court.

"My legal team is very very confident that we're going to be successful," he told The Star.

"There's already a high level of suspicion about the integrity of the CRTC process and I believe it's time to change it," he added.

"When people get to the real heart of how close the relationship has been between the cable industry and the CRTC, they'll want a public inquiry."

Mahar, 32, is suing Rogers for \$2.52 a month, a total of \$25 or so by the time he gets to court next fall.

It doesn't sound like much but the implications are enormous.

"The government has an obligation here to examine how a CRTC decision turned into a 'half-for-you, half-for-me deal' between producers and cable companies," said Liberal MP Dan McTeague, one of Mahar's supporters.

"What is happening is nothing short of a consumer rip-off."

In fact, when the decision to cut this deal for cable companies was rendered in 1993, three CRTC commissioners issued a strongly-worded dissention.

They said that they couldn't "accept breaking a commitment to cable subscribers" that rates would go down this year.

But the cable industry, who will benefit by \$300 million, just brushes that off.

Said Richard Stursberg, president of the Canadian Cable Television Association: "It's not clear to me that this is money that somehow belongs in consumers' pockets."

Subject(s) - The Toronto Star : cable television rates Canada damages

Edition: SU2

Length: Medium, 300 words

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Doc. : news·19950709·TS·31716