



## **Cable competition and the invisible Latinos**

**By Robert Deposada**

Given the attention devoted by the television industry to the demographics of market audiences, it's astounding that America's Latino families have remained all but invisible to cable TV providers.

Last year that the Latino population of the United States surpassed 40 million, which means there are more Hispanics living in the USA than in all of Argentina or Venezuela. We are not only the largest minority group in America, but we are the fastest growing segment of the population and the youngest.

New immigrants from Hispanic countries still struggle economically, but annual consumer purchasing power of Hispanic-Americans overall was \$557 billion last year and is projected to reach \$1 trillion by 2010. Second- and third-generation Latino kids are graduating from high school and going on to college in record numbers. Not incidentally, Latino families watch more prime time TV than any other group and we use on-line services almost as much as our Anglo neighbors.

But a visitor to this country wouldn't realize any of this watching cable TV, even in areas with substantial Latino populations. There is an inexcusable lack of Spanish language programming or original programming in English or Spanish reflecting the culture and concerns of Latino communities.

Insulated by the monopoly power of the exclusive video franchise agreements used by most cities and towns, the cable companies have no incentive to offer programming sensitive to the needs of Latino viewers or even to court advertising revenue from the growing Hispanic-American market. The simple fact is that cable providers have been able to ignore the Hispanic community or take our business for granted.

But Latinos and the cable TV industry are about to get better acquainted and the force bringing us together is competition. If legislators at the state and federal levels can simplify or eliminate the local cable franchising regulations that are delaying market entry by new competitors, there is no shortage of high-tech companies ready to make a competitive offer to all consumers.

Companies are now building high-speed broadband networks to provide cable TV, high-speed Internet access and phone service, combined in one bundle of services or offered separately.

**“Cable competition and the invisible Latinos”**

Helping these new competitors cut through the tangle of local franchising regulations would bring lower prices and faster access to new technology for all consumers more quickly. In U.S. towns where this new competition is already up and running, cable rates have been reduced by as much as 42 percent. For Latinos, widespread competition also brings the satisfaction that someone in the video services market is finally paying attention to the unique needs of our communities.

For instance, Verizon’s new Internet-based FiOS network, for example, has 31 channels of Spanish language and Latino-interest programming. In an industry that has been scandalously slow to roll out new services to Latino neighborhoods, Verizon’s advanced broadband network will help give our communities the broadband infrastructure we need to keep up with an economy that increasingly requires high-speed broadband connections to find a job, get an education or start a business.

When cable competition becomes the norm instead of the exception, I’m sure the traditional cable companies will counter with new offers and new technology of their own. Latinos will be able to choose the company that makes the best offer.

And just having a choice will mean that 40 million people are no longer invisible.

###

*Robert Deposada is President of The Latino Coalition. The Latino Coalition is a non-profit, non-partisan organization based in Washington, D.C. TLC was established to address policy issues that directly affect the well-being of Hispanics in the United States. For more detailed information on The Latino Coalition, please visit our website at [www.TheLatinoCoalition.com](http://www.TheLatinoCoalition.com).*