

Public access television may face regulations



SALEM (AP) — Late-night channel surfers in Portland know all about Jim Spagg — maybe more than they ever wanted to.

Amid the infomercials and talk shows, viewers can be jolted by the images of Spagg's genitalia and bodily functions.

Spagg defecates on the air, joins women dancing in the buff and swears throughout his program.

"If I did it in public, I would be arrested because it's against the law," Spagg says. "But what I was doing is legal."

His right: The Federal Communications Commission bars any regulation of content on public access television. Cable providers also cannot block any type of public access programming.

Still, nudity on public programming is unusual, said FCC spokesman Morgan Broman.

In Tucson, Ariz., a talk show titled "The Great Satan at Large" was taken off the air after it showed a 16-year-old girl dancing in the nude. The host was convicted

of contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

Oregon state Rep. Bob Tiernan wants Spagg off the air as well. The Lake Oswego Republican has introduced several bills that would force the state to regulate what can be shown on public access cable.

Tiernan says he wants to protect families with children who get the channel with their basic cable TV service.

"People defecating, women urinating, little boys running around naked. What he shows on TV are things you couldn't get at a local X-rated movie theater," Tiernan says.

Tiernan says he doesn't know whether his effort to restrict cable television programming will run into trouble with federal regulations.

One of Tiernan's bills would require the state Public Utility Commission to regulate broadcasting of objectionable material such as Spagg's programs. Any program a community access provider finds objectionable would have to be broadcast after 10 p.m.

A separate channel for the purpose of broadcasting objectionable programs also would have to be created. Viewers would

have to specifically subscribe to that channel to get its material.

Spagg's program is aired at different times, but usually after 10 p.m. He admits that many people find his show offensive, and says at times he gets 200 complaints in an hour. During his show, Spagg flashes his home telephone number on the screen.

"I feel that an artist has a responsibility to give a message to people who don't have time to find that message," Spagg says. "The show that I do is a public and social service."

Spagg says he's decided not to make another series, however, because there's no money in it. He says he might produce an occasional show.

Rosa Leonardi, community development coordinator with Capital Community Television in Salem, says she believes Spagg's program is the only cable access show in Oregon featuring nudity. She, too, has heard of no such controversies in other states.

Another of Tiernan's bills would require cable companies to provide a system so programs could be electronically blocked, free of charge. Cable companies

now rent blocking devices to some customers.

"Unless somebody says, 'I want to see Jim Spagg in my living room,' it will not come across," Tiernan says.

Robert Brading, executive director of Multnomah Community Television, says public access television must allow people to use air time and equipment on a first-come, first-serve basis.

"Community television is established as a First Amendment forum," Brading says. "What I feel about this program is irrelevant. We're not allowed to censor, and we don't."

Diane Kolb, PUC spokeswoman, says the agency cannot monitor or regulate content of cable programs.

"We really don't have any domain in this at all. It doesn't relate to any of the things that we regulate," she says.

Tiernan says he wants the PUC and cable access providers to take responsibility for regulating programming, or tell him who can.

"It's frustrating to sit here and listen to people say how they agree this is outrageous, and yet no one is willing to step out and do something about it," he says.

Kitzhaber defends economic agency

PORTLAND (AP) — Gov. John Kitzhaber defended the state Economic Development Department Monday, citing a report showing the agency has helped pump \$4.7 billion worth of investment into Oregon in the past 18 months.

The report was issued less than a week after a leading economist called for the elimination of the economic development agency, which has come in for criticism from House Speaker Bev Clarno, R-Bend.

The Democratic governor praised the agency as he accepted the report on its accomplishments from Charles Armstrong, chairman of the Economic Development Commission.

"Clearly these efforts are making a difference," Kitzhaber said.

"We have a below-average jobless rate throughout the

state, we have above-average employment in 12 of Oregon's counties, and we have record levels of business investments."

William Conerly, chief economist for First Interstate Bank, argued in a paper published by the Cascade Policy Institute in Portland that private business should market the state to outside companies and entrepreneurs.

Clarno has said she agrees with Conerly, promising a bill that would shift Economic Development Department duties to other state agencies and reduce its financing.

The Bend Republican said private industry could do a better job marketing the state.

Kitzhaber, however, said the report shows the agency helped create 7,700 jobs in the past 18 months — proof it is essential to building the state economy.

Steel workers will vote on contract

SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — About 3,000 striking workers are preparing to vote on a tentative agreement to end their eight-day walkout at Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical Corp. plants in three states.

Rank-and-file members of the United Steelworkers of America are scheduled to vote Tuesday at the five plants hit by the strike.

During weekend talks in Salt Lake City, Kaiser and union leaders negotiated a new 47-month contract proposal that includes a new signing-bonus option and an improvement in health-care benefits for spouses.

The latest offer is identical to an earlier proposal in terms of wages and job-security provisions, said Barry Christensen, president of Local 7945 in Tacoma.

Most union members have cited those two issues as their primary reasons for going on strike.

Several Local 329 members who picketed Monday outside the Mead smelter north of Spokane said they planned to vote against the latest proposal.

"It's basically the same as the old one," said Dan Cunningham,

a quality control worker who also voted against the first proposal.

"If we've gone this far (by going on strike), why give it up now?" asked crane operator Tom Caviezel.

Members walked off their jobs Feb. 20 after voting 1,448 to 1,211 to reject a contract the company presented last month. Members had been working under an extension to a contract that expired Oct. 31.

The strike involves two Spokane-area plants at Mead and Trentwood with a total of 2,048 Steelworkers and a Tacoma smelter with 265 members. The other strike sites are an alumina refinery in Gramercy, La., and a rod and bar plant in Heath, Ohio. Those plants each employ about 300 members.

Kaiser has kept the plants operating with about 700 salaried workers from those plants and other Kaiser operations. The employees have worked expanded schedules, and Kaiser has acknowledged production levels have dropped during the strike.

Members could be back on their jobs late Tuesday or early Wednesday if they ratify the new

proposal, which all six of the union local presidents have recommended. Voting is scheduled to end at 6 p.m. PST.

The latest offer gives members the option of taking a signing bonus in the form of a \$200 payment or two personal days off during the life of the contract. The previous proposal did not include the personal-day option.

The new proposal also expands eligibility for health-care benefits to spouses making as much as \$15,000 per year. The ceiling was \$10,000 in the previous proposal.

Most spouses still make too much to qualify for benefits, despite the higher ceiling, Caviezel said. He said his wife earns too much to gain coverage through Kaiser, and her own job doesn't offer health care.

"She's the one telling me to vote no," he said.

Union workers, who make an average of \$13 per hour, contend the proposed contract does not go far enough to boost wages. The proposal includes a \$1-per-hour raise over four years and bonuses tied to productivity and metals prices.

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