

FCC: TV stations must post rates for campaign ads

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In this June 16, 2009 file photo, Federal Communications Commission Chairman (FCC) Julius Genachowski testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington. The FCC has voted to require television stations to post online the advertising rates they charge political candidates and advocacy groups. (AP Photo/Harry Hamburg, File)

(AP) -- The Federal Communications Commission voted Friday to require broadcast TV stations to post online the advertising rates they charge political candidates and advocacy groups.

The vote came despite strong opposition from many broadcasters, who have argued that making sensitive advertising rate information so publically available will undermine stations' competitiveness and give advertisers unfair leverage over how much they are willing to pay. A

coalition of broadcasters put forth a compromise plan that would have required TV stations to put public files online while shielding information about political spending.

[FCC Chairman](#) Julius Genachowski rejected the compromise, noting stations already make available paper records of what they charge political advertisers. He said there was no reason such information should be "stuck in a filing cabinet" in an online world.

Genachowski and another Democratic commissioner, Mignon Clyburn, voted in favor of the new disclosure rules. Commissioner Robert McDowell, a Republican, voted in favor of an overall measure requiring stations to move their public files online but dissented on disclosing the political file.

The National Association of Broadcasters, a lobbying group that represents television stations, criticized the vote.

"By forcing broadcasters to be the only medium to disclose on the Internet our political advertising rates, the FCC jeopardizes the competitive standing of stations," NAB executive vice president Dennis Wharton said in a statement.

By law, [television stations](#) offer [political candidates advertising rates](#) that are much lower than those offered to other advertisers. Stations also allow the public to review paper records of what they charge political advertisers.

But disclosure advocates say the process of retrieving the information is far too cumbersome, requiring interested parties to show up at the television station during office hours and photocopy many pages of records.

More important, advocates argue the public should have easy access to information about how much candidates and other groups are spending on television to lure voters.

"The Commission's action is an important victory for transparency and accountability in our nation's public policy, making broadcasters' public files truly public," said Meredith McGehee, policy director of the Campaign Legal Center, which advocated for the change.

The new rule will require stations to digitize and upload the information, in real time, to the FCC's website, <http://www.fcc.gov> .

Network-affiliated stations in the top 50 markets will have six months to comply. For all others, the deadline is 2014.

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