

FCC wants more companies making cable boxes

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The government wants to make it easier for you to buy and use cable boxes from companies other than your cable provider.

This could help companies like TiVo, Roku and Apple deliver a cable feed, too, as part of their video recorders or streaming-TV devices.

Introducing competition could also help lower people's cable bills. The Federal Communications Commission says that 99 percent of cable and satellite TV customers rent boxes from their cable providers, and that the price of cable boxes has nearly tripled since 1994. Meanwhile, prices of common consumer electronics like cellphones, TVs and computers have fallen sharply. The FCC says the average U.S. household pays \$231 a year to rent a cable box.

FCC commissioners will vote on the proposal on Feb. 18. That would kick off a process of writing new rules, which will likely take several months.

The rules would replace an old technology, called CableCard, that lets consumers get a card from their [cable companies](#) and stick it into another box like a TiVo. It was supposed to free consumers from cable boxes, but it wasn't very popular.

"CableCard never achieved a very competitive marketplace," said Chris Lewis, vice president of government affairs for consumer advocacy group Public Knowledge. He hopes new rules could help other

companies create technology that appeals to more consumers.

In an op-ed, FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler said new boxes could help you ditch extra remotes and better integrate content like Netflix and Amazon with a cable-TV feed, so that you can search for shows and movies across all your subscription services simultaneously.

An industry group made up of cable companies, the Future of TV Coalition, said the FCC's proposal could lead to higher prices, "eliminates security protections, and provides no reassurance on privacy rights." In a statement, the group said many consumers are already watching cable through different kinds of apps and devices, such as a streaming TV box to watch HBO Go. Big cable TV providers like Comcast, Time Warner, Dish and Charter are also experimenting with TV services that are delivered online and don't require a cable box.

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