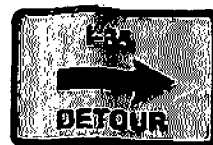


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## State board member backs pulling Channel One's plug

By Jim Suydam

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Each day, nearly 1.1 million Texas schoolchildren sit watching commercials for Hostess snack foods, Pepsi products and the occasional movie, such as "Dude, Where's My Car?"

This school-time activity is something that State Board of

Education member Judy Strickland wants to stop.

Today, Strickland will offer a resolution encouraging every school in the state to pull Channel One, the satellite TV network that provides television to schools in exchange for teen viewers for its news and entertainment programming.

"It's amazing how many people don't know about this,"

said Strickland, who is vying for a state House seat against Speaker Pete Laney, D-Hale Center. "I just think it's time to put this issue on the forefront, so parents and citizens can be aware of what Channel One is all about and decide if their child should be exposed to it during school time."

See **EDUCATION, A15**



**Judy Strickland**

School is no place for TV commercials, she says.

Just what is Channel One? **A15.**

# EDUCATION: State board may weigh in on Channel One

Continued from A1

Nearly 1,300 secondary schools across the state — including some in Austin — sit their students down to watch 10 minutes of news and entertainment programming provided by Channel One Communications, according to Jeff Ballabon, vice president of public policy for Channel One Communications' parent corporation, Primedia.

Opposition to Channel One, once the source of much controversy, has been largely dormant in Texas for the past several years. In 1992, the State Board of Education voted to leave the issue to local school boards, but it discouraged its use. Last year, the Rockwall school district dropped its contract with the company and returned the 114 TVs and other equipment the company had given the school.

The program and its two minutes of advertising reach nearly one-quarter of the state's 4.1 million students. More than 99 percent of the schools using Channel One have renewed their contracts with the media company in the 10 years it has been doing business in the state,

## Channel One

Channel One, a for-profit service, provides the use of televisions if school districts agree that students will watch a 10-minute daily newscast covering domestic and international news of the day, as well as entertainment features. Thursday's top story, for example, was about Bush's call for teens to take part in the Pledge of Allegiance. In addition to the newscast, students watch two minutes of commercials. The company says 8 million schoolchildren in 12,000 schools watch the program.

he said.

"Texas has been a very loyal market for us; clearly the educators who use us, love us," Ballabon said.

Strickland hopes to threaten that market loyalty. Her resolution, which was not posted to allow for public comment, will be bolstered by the testimony of a Ralph Nader protégé from

Portland, Ore., and a Christian social conservative from Birmingham, Ala.

The two men will show the board clips of ads from Channel One productions.

"I think they will be very angry about what Channel One is doing," said Jim Metrock of Obligation Inc., a nonprofit group from Alabama that focuses on the media's effect on children. "I don't want kids in school seeing ads for movies like 'Dude, Where's My Car?' That movie is about two potheads. It glorifies drug use."

Metrock said the blessing of the state board toward his effort to rid schools of Channel One will be a powerful, if nonbinding, victory.

Ballabon said Texas is only the latest battleground between Channel One and these two activists, whom he called "a radical, anti-free-market group."

"They could care less if anything they do is harmful to the education of Texas students," Ballabon said. "When this decision is left to the educators, Channel One stays." Joining Metrock will be the head of a group founded by Ralph Nader, Commercial Alert.

"Right, left, center and everyone in between, Channel One is something we all can agree on," said Gary Ruskin of Commercial Alert. "This issue has brought together Ralph Nader and Phyllis Schlafly in their opposition to it. And how many things can they agree on?"

Ruskin said the commercialization of the state's classrooms wastes time and erodes the integrity of the public education system.

The Austin school district couldn't say how many of its schools contract with Channel One, because each school negotiates its own contract, spokeswoman Nicole Kaufman said. Round Rock schools do not have Channel One.

The way in which Strickland has gone about the resolution, however, has even longtime opponents of Channel One crying foul. "The only comments that will be allowed will be from opponents of Channel One," said Houston resident Karen Miller, who has opposed Channel One. "While I agree with them, I just don't think that's right."

Regardless, it's legal, said Texas Education Agency attorney David Anderson. "Since

they don't have any authority over it, it's just a recommendation," he said. If approved, the resolution will be sent to the more than 1,000 Texas school districts.

And how much does a recommendation from the state board count for? "That's up to the individual districts," said Marty DeLeon of the Texas Association of School Boards. "I certainly think that they'll stop and take a look at this, but I think it's going to be a case-by-case decision by each local district."

jsuydam@statesman.com; 445-3635