Wednesday, Feb. 23, 2011

## Wasting tax dollars on FCC policy

As a third-generation resident of Montgomery County, I have long-tolerated the county's foibles that waste precious taxpayer dollars. However, with the county's spending of nearly \$65,000 to date on a Washington, D.C., law firm to represent it in the Federal Communication Commission's proceeding to promote a retail market for the next generation of cable and satellite set-top boxes, the county has gone from the sublime to the ridiculous.

First, it is simply not the role of local county government to influence the technical design of consumer electronics. By any reasonable measure, consumer electronics is hardly a traditional local service like schools, roads, firefighters and police.

Second, the county's only contribution to the debate was to ask the FCC to force satellite and cable providers to sell consumers their existing boxes. However, as the FCC's statutory mandate is to take steps to create a retail market for new set-top boxes from firms other than cable and satellite companies, all the county's proposal would do is cost its residents more money.

Given the county's budget crunch, County Executive Leggett should put a prompt end to this tomfoolery and ask the Inspector General to investigate this fiasco. The county has no business frittering away our tax dollars by getting involved in the debate over consumer electronics, much less making ill-formed arguments that hurt consumers' pocketbooks.

Lawrence J. Spiwak, Rockville

1 of 1 2/23/2011 4:20 PM