

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN RICK BOUCHER

Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet Hearing Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission

September 17, 2009

Good morning.

Today the Subcommittee conducts its first oversight hearing of the FCC in the 111th Congress.

This hearing was postponed from July, and the benefit of the postponement is that now we have a full complement of Commissioners before us.

I'm pleased to welcome each of you this morning and would note that for Chairman Julius Genachowski, and Commissioners Mignon Clyburn and Meredith Baker, today marks their inaugural appearance before the House as FCC Commissioners.

We look forward to seeing more of all of you in the months to come and to working closely with you as together we address the nation's telecommunications needs.

Before commenting on current issues, I want to take this opportunity to commend Commissioner Capps for his leadership in helping to ensure the success of the DTV transition during his months serving as Acting Chairman of the agency. Your commitment to consumer education, including the deployment of knowledgeable staff around the country, was essential to ensuring that the vast majority of households were prepared on June 13.

I also want to commend Commissioner McDowell for his collaboration with you in that effort and particularly thank him for his role in bringing attention to the fact that as of last January the FCC's call centers were inadequately staffed and wholly unprepared to handle the expected high volume of calls from viewers seeking technical assistance.

Chairman Genachowski, from our previous discussions I am aware of the priority you are assigning to the creation of a broadband plan for the nation which is due mid-February of next year. The blueprint is urgently needed to promote universal broadband access, achieve data rates substantially higher than the average speeds available today and promote greater demand for broadband among those who have access but have not subscribed to it. I know that you share those goals, and we look forward to the plan you will present.

Many other matters are receiving our attention and yours. I'll briefly comment on several of them and ask for your thoughts.

Our Subcommittee has scheduled an upcoming hearing on the need for a nationwide, fully interoperable communications network for first responders during which we will hear from first responders, commercial wireless carriers and other interested parties.

A variety of proposals have been made for how the D Block of 700 MHZ spectrum should be utilized in meeting this goal. If you have given attention to the matter and have thoughts to share this morning, we would welcome them.

We are having bipartisan discussions among Subcommittee members about an appropriate statutory reform of the universal service fund, and I anticipate that a comprehensive reform bill will be introduced shortly.

We have introduced with bipartisan support a measure designed to inventory radio spectrum with the goal of making available additional spectrum for commercial wireless services.

Later in this Congress, we intend to put forward legislation addressing broader needs with respect to wireless services and a measure extending a clear set of privacy rights to Internet users.

I expect that each of these measures will be constructed in a bipartisan process and have broad bipartisan support.

Any views you currently have on these matters will be welcome.

Today's hearing is an opportunity for Chairman Genachowski and Commission members to tell us about their agenda for upcoming efforts to enhance our nation's telecommunications capabilities, and I look forward to their testimony.