

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN RICK BOUCHER

In Support of the Satellite Home Viewer Reauthorization Act of 2009

December 2, 2009

I yield to myself such time as I may consume.

In a collaborative process, the House Energy and Commerce and Judiciary Committees are presenting to the House today a renewal of the Satellite Home Viewer Act, provisions of which are scheduled to expire at the end of this year.

The Act enables the delivery by satellite of distant network signals to homes that cannot receive network programming from a local TV station.

We are taking the opportunity of this reauthorization to achieve a long held goal of having all 210 local television markets across the nation uplinked by satellite for the retransmission back into the markets in which the local TV signals originate.

The goal is to ensure that satellite TV subscribers everywhere will be able to receive both national programming and the local TV stations that serve their area.

At the present time, there are 28 local TV markets in rural areas that do not have local TV signals delivered by either of the satellite TV carriers, and much of our effort this year has been directed toward finding a way to obtain satellite carriage of these 28 rural markets.

Earlier this year, following extensive discussions with the company, I received a letter from Echostar, commonly known as the Dish Network, agreeing to uplink for local retransmission all 210 local TV markets upon certain conditions.

One condition is that the company receive the ability in our legislation to import into the markets distant network signals in order to supply the missing networks in the markets that do not have a full complement of networks represented by local affiliates.

The bill we are presenting today grants that permission if Echostar in fact provides local TV service in all 210 TV markets nationwide.

Another condition of the company's willingness to serve all 210 markets is that the law not impose new carriage obligations that the company would have to devote satellite capacity to meeting.

While the bill does impose some new carriage obligations, I am optimistic that they will not be so extensive as to prevent Echostar from launching local TV service in all 210 local markets over the coming year.

Providing local TV service in the 28 currently unserved local markets will make local TV news, sports, weather, essential emergency information and locally originated programs available in every part of the nation, a goal we are now very close to achieving.

Serving the now 28 unserved local TV markets involves a major expenditure by Echostar for ground based facilities in each unserved market and the launch in 2010 of a new satellite costing hundreds of millions of dollars.

I commend Echostar for expressing a willingness to make these substantial investments if we pass legislation meeting the conditions I previously described.

I also commend television broadcasters and DirecTV who played highly constructive roles as our negotiations proceeded and the gentleman from Michigan Mr. Stupak for calling attention to the need to have all 210 local TV markets served with local TV service.

The bill before us makes other changes needed to harmonize the satellite carriage licenses with the transition from analog to digital TV broadcasting, and it will result in more high definition carriage of PBS stations under the terms of an amendment offered by the gentlelady from California Ms. Eschoo.

I want to thank Chairman Conyers and his excellent staff for the cooperative work with my staff and with me as our two committees structured the bill we present to the House today.

I urge approval of the bill.