

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
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Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
“Federal Government Spectrum Use”
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
July 6, 2011

Today the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology will hold its fourth hearing regarding spectrum policy. Over the course of our previous hearings, two things have become clear. First, there is strong bipartisan consensus that we need to find additional spectrum for wireless broadband. Second, there is bipartisan support for creating a nationwide broadband network for public safety.

One topic we have not had an opportunity to explore yet is the role of federal spectrum in achieving these goals. Today we will examine federal spectrum use and whether there are opportunities to reallocate federal spectrum for commercial purposes.

I am hopeful that we will be able to use these hearings and the excellent testimony we have heard as the basis for consensus spectrum legislation.

I would like to welcome Assistant Secretary Lawrence E. Strickling back to the Energy and Commerce Committee. As the Administrator of NTIA – the agency tasked with managing federal spectrum assignments – Mr. Strickling will play a critical role in maximizing the efficient and effective federal use of spectrum. Under his leadership, NTIA is leading the Administration’s effort to identify and reallocate spectrum to meet our dramatically increasing demands for wireless broadband. This is a huge project, and NTIA’s dedicated professionals deserve enormous credit for accomplishing what they have to date.

Although federal spectrum has great potential to help us address our growing broadband needs, we must utilize a balanced approach in getting there. Companies that bid on federal spectrum for commercial purposes need to know when they will have access to this critical and expensive resource. The reallocation of federal spectrum must be transparent, timely, and certain so companies can bid accordingly. If we provide the proper mix of transparency and certainty, the amount companies are willing to pay will increase and the taxpayers will benefit. We also need to consider new ways to put federal spectrum towards commercial use. Using technology to allow for spectrum sharing deserves careful and immediate consideration.

At the same time, we need to remember that federal spectrum is currently being utilized for important purposes, involving national security, public safety, and important agency operations. We cannot expect agencies and users to simply turn off a switch and turn over their spectrum. We need to provide adequate resources and time to make complicated and expensive relocation efforts successful.

I look forward to hearing Mr. Strickling's testimony and learning more about the Administration's spectrum initiative, challenges with relocating federal users, and how we can balance the need for more information about federal spectrum use with our national security concerns.

Thank you.