

TV translator organization wants broadband plan answers

29 March, 2011 01:12:00



The National Translator Association has fired off a letter to members of Congress noting that the National Broadband Plan seeks spectrum from the television band, yet breathes not a word about the disposition of Class A, low power and translator stations. NTA wants to know where the sunshine is.

The letter was written by NTA President Byron St. Clair and counsel George R. Borsari Jr.

Urging Congress to stop NBP until it has been fully vetted, they wrote, “It has become obvious over the last year that the Office of the Chairman of the FCC wants the plan implemented piecemeal, so that there can be no comparison of the trade-offs required to effectuate the plan. The draft ‘repacking’ plan has been competed, but not released. The implementing regulations have been completed, but not release. Why?”

NTA says stations in its class number over 7,000, and for the most part serve rural areas that otherwise would have no television service at all. “Is it a fair trade to cause the loss of television service to residents of rural areas, so that some can play games on their telephones?” they wonder. “We don not think so.”

They also question whether three or four telco (depending on whether the proposed AT&T/T-Mobile merger is allowed) companies could actually come up with the \$30B the FCC estimates a spectrum auction might generate.

They concluded, “NTA requests that Congress continue to press the FCC for a full spectrum inventory, including usage in addition to holdings. NTA also requests that no enabling legislation be passed until a fully developed plan is presented by the FCC and fully disclosed.”

RBR-TVBR observation: Are we really ready to throw rural, poor and elderly viewers who depend on over-the-air television under the bus while telcos and MVPDs are sitting on unused spectrum, especially when rapidly-improving technology may solve the spectrum problem, and the broadcast distribution model may be part of the answer? Let’s slow this down and get the usage inventory done.

That’s not to mention lack of consideration for low power television operators who have been taking on the difficult task of providing television service on a small signal to a small concentration of population. The FCC loves to toss the word “local” around, and it doesn’t get any more local than those providing low power service. These broadcasters deserve consideration and certainty, and the FCC should provide it sooner rather than later.

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