



STATE BROADCASTERS (INCLUDING YOUR WBA) ASK SENATE LEADERS TO PROTECT FREE TV

By Deborah McAdams, Television Broadcast - Washington

On June 29, broadcasters from all 50 states and Puerto Rico implored the Senate leadership to preserve over-the-air TV even as lawmakers seek to reclaim its spectrum. The group referred to a bill passed by the Senate Commerce Committee authorizing incentive auctions for broadcast spectrum relinquished for wireless broadband.

“Our concerns are directed at the ‘repacking’ provisions of the legislation, and the need for adequate viewer protections that will preserve the ability of all Americans to continue to receive a robust, free over-the-air television signal,” members of the state broadcast associations wrote to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky.

The broadcasters asked that the Federal Communications Commission be “required to replicate each remaining station’s coverage area so that no viewers are disenfranchised.”

In the event that stations receive new channel assignments, the group asked that each station be allowed to continue broadcasting as they do now, and not be reassigned to channels with poorer reception. They also requested the same interference protections that are now in place.

“A reduction in any of these protections will ultimately disenfranchise viewers,” they said. “Consumers in urban areas will find it difficult to receive their favorite TV stations with indoor antennas. It will also make it more difficult to receive signals in rural areas, which are typically at the outer fringes of a television station’s coverage area.”

The group also asked Reid and McConnell to consider the stability of broadcasting for consumers on a “going-forward basis.”

“Two years ago, our country completed its transition to digital television in which every television station shut off its analog transmitter and broadcast only in a digital format, typically on a different channel,” they wrote. “The result was a considerable amount of confusion for television viewers. Even today, there continue to be viewers who cannot receive a signal from a station they previously viewed without difficulty.”

“The repacking provisions of S. 911 contemplate a similar, and perhaps more complex, transition, which we anticipate will cause confusion and possible disruption for many television viewers.”

The group said it would prefer that the FCC be limited to holding a single incentive auction to minimize the impact of repacking.

“Television broadcasters spent over \$10 billion to comply with the government mandates to convert to digital television,” they said. “If the government is now going to rearrange the television broadcast bands again, it is essential this legislation address the economic impact of relocation.”