

Congress Should Reject Microsoft Spectrum Grab

ISSUE SUMMARY

Microsoft is lobbying Congress and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for free TV airwaves to operate unlicensed devices. Microsoft claims this would unlock broadband for rural America, but it won't. Instead, it will put rural Americans' lifeline local TV service at risk. Broadcasters urge policymakers to reject Microsoft's proposal and ensure your constituents have access to the critical news and emergency information local TV stations provide.

Here's why:

Microsoft has been promising rural broadband for nearly a decade, but has not delivered. Microsoft asked for, and was given, free access to airwaves in 2008. The FCC also granted unlicensed devices the ability to operate at higher powers and closer to television stations to help deployment. Now Microsoft is pulling a bait and switch. The company promised innovation and investment, but now claims that the airwaves it has already been given aren't good enough. Microsoft wants to take away channels from television stations with no promise to offer anything in their place. This harms television viewers throughout the country with no promise that broadband service will ever be offered.

Groups representing rural Americans are not falling for it. Cattlemen, wheat growers, agri-women and state agriculture departments are opposing Microsoft's spectrum grab because they recognize how vital local broadcasting is for rural communities. Microsoft claims the airwaves they want reserved for its use are "vacant channels," but if that were the case, no changes would be needed to current rules. Microsoft can already use unused television channels to provide rural broadband services. In fact, there are currently two channels provided in each television market available for use and immense amounts of spectrum in other bands.

Recently, the FCC held an auction of the broadcast airwaves to make more channels available for wireless services. Microsoft chose not to purchase airwaves in that auction, but is now asking the FCC to give it airwaves at no cost and on better terms. As a result of the auction, the amount of airwaves available for local TV is shrinking. Nearly 1,000 TV stations are currently being moved to new channels to make room for wireless services. As part of this process, many low-power TV stations and translators, which help carry the signals farther and bring TV service to rural America, are being forced off the air. Viewers are already at risk of losing critical local news, emergency weather and community information. Microsoft's plan to set aside more airwaves for unlicensed devices would further harm viewers in this process. And while Microsoft could use other

bands of spectrum, low-power TV stations and translators have nowhere else to go, leaving their viewers in the dark.

Congress should not harm television viewers to give a \$700 billion company a handout. Despite being given the airwaves to do so, Microsoft has not delivered on its promise to bring broadband to rural America and there's no guarantee it will do so in the future.