

Chairman Dingell at the Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet Hearing entitled, "Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission -- the 700 MHz Auction"

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND THE INTERNET HEARING ENTITLED "OVERSIGHT OF THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION -- THE 700 MHz AUCTION"
April 15, 2008

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing, and thanks to our distinguished witnesses appearing before us today. Our goal today is two-fold. We will examine the results of the recent 700 megahertz auction and consider how those results will affect consumers. We will also look at the public safety D Block, where the auction failed. We must consider how the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) can craft a workable plan for the D Block that will bring true interoperability to our Nation's first responders.

At the outset, I congratulate the Commission for its courage in adopting open access requirements for the C Block. I note with approval that, as a result, Verizon Wireless is already taking concrete steps to open its network. I will be watching this closely, and the Commission should as well. I also look forward to learning more about the announced plans of AT&T and other carriers to provide more openness. If done correctly, we will see more technological innovation and greater consumer choice.

I am particularly interested in how our witnesses view the results of the auction. For instance, should we be concerned that no new entrant for broadband services emerged from the auction? Should it be a matter of concern that the Nation's largest carriers came away with the most spectrum? How should this increase in spectrum consolidation guide our discussions, if at all?

The most important issue, however, is that of public safety interoperability. There is high concern, which I share, as to how to proceed with the re-auction of the D Block. This is an opportunity for the Committee and for the Commission to make our Nation more secure and give our first responders a crucial tool they desperately need. I urge my fellow Members to keep this goal in mind and to proceed deliberately and carefully, as I intend to do.

I support the concept of a public-private partnership for very practical reasons. We can all agree that the state of public safety interoperability must be improved upon. This problem cannot be solved solely at the State or local level--this is a national problem requiring Federal participation. And the public safety community does not have sufficient funds to do it by themselves.

I believe the Commission, public safety, and industry should continue to work together to craft a viable solution. If done correctly, the private sector will help provide a world-class, interoperable public safety network. I ask the Commission to make a serious, exhaustive effort to solve this problem. I am also open to other ideas, and I expect we will receive thoughtful analysis from today's witnesses.

That said, I am presently unmoved by suggestions that we should simply auction the 10 megahertz D Block for purely

commercial use and hand the proceeds to public safety. At this moment I consider such an approach to be an admission that we are not serious about attaining true interoperability. It is more important to me, and it should be more important to the Commission, that we take the time necessary to craft a workable plan.

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce
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