New Bill Offers Government Agencies Incentive for Clearing Airwaves

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U.S. Representatives Brett Guthrie (R-KY) and Doris Matsui (D-CA), co-chairs of the House Energy and Commerce Committee Spectrum Working Group, on Monday introduced legislation that offers financial incentives to government agencies for vacating their unused spectrum.

The bill was cosponsored by Energy and Commerce Committee Ranking Member Henry Waxman (D-CA), Communications and Technology Subcommittee Chairman Greg Walden (R-OR) and Ranking Member Anna Eshoo (D-CA).

House Resolution 3674 would extend incentive auction-like authority to the Commercial Spectrum Enhancement Act as an alternative to the relocation cost recovery provisions of the Spectrum Relocation Trust Fund. The new incentive applies to all federal agencies holding federal spectrum.

Matsui said in a statement that the U.S. requires “smart and sound” spectrum policy.

“As the single largest spectrum user in the country, the United States government must be more efficient in managing our spectrum,” Matsui said. “By providing financial incentives for the first time, this bipartisan legislation will serve as a model to encourage the government to reallocate non-critical spectrum for commercial purposes.”

The FCC’s National Broadband Plan calls for 500 MHz of new commercial spectrum in 10 years.

Among its provisions, the Federal Spectrum Incentive Act creates a new Federal Spectrum Incentive Auction Fund so participating government agencies can access a portion of the revenue from the auctions of their relinquished spectrum. Among the potential uses, money from the fund may be used to offset sequestration cuts. It may also be transferred and shared between federal agencies either relinquishing spectrum or be made to accommodate relocating systems.

Jot Carpenter, vice president, government affairs for CTIA, applauded the bill.

“The federal government is the single largest holder of spectrum below 3 GHz, and incenting agencies to relinquish bands they aren’t utilizing or using efficiently can help the commercial mobile industry gain access to the spectrum it needs to maintain America’s place as the world’s leader in wireless broadband service. We hope the full Energy and Commerce Committee will approve the bill when it is considered on Wednesday,” Carpenter wrote.

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