Stephenson: New FCC Showing 'Bias Towards Action'

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AT&T is hoping for a more agile, fast-acting FCC under new Chairman Tom Wheeler’s direction.

Randall Stephenson, CEO of AT&T, said in a remarks at the UBS Media & Telecom Investor Conference, that his company had filed its intentions with the FCC to move to an all-IP network but noted there was very little movement from the commission on the project, at least under previous Chairman Julius Genachowski's leadership.

“Fortunately, the new Chairman, Tom Wheeler, has stepped in and we're going to see movement on this,” Stephenson said.

AT&T hopes to have its networks transitioned to all-IP by somewhere around 2020.

Stephenson said benefits of an early initiative called “Project Agile” might be seen within the next two to three years. However, he also admitted that AT&T would see the most significant cost savings when its circuit-switched network could be taken offline.

When asked how he felt about Wheeler’s recent comments during his first month as Chairman, Stephenson said that he’s encouraged.

“It appears to be a bias towards action,” Stephenson said, conceding that he’s quite confident, it's not going to be “all action that we're all going to like.”

Stephenson said he’s concerned about the amount of capital investment by U.S. businesses right now, which he claimed is at its lowest levels since World War II. He thinks that part of the reason for business holding back on investments is the uncertain regulatory environment.

“We cannot have a regulatory agency that holds power over so much that’s lagging,” Stephenson said, referring to the FCC. “The biggest cost of regulation is this inability to plan.”

And while Stephenson applauded Wheeler for what appears to be a “bias towards action,” he also complimented Wheeler for having recently pushed out the upcoming 600 MHz incentive auction to 2015.

“The art and science of this auction is going to be very complex,” Stephenson said. “In fact, I don’t think I’ve never seen one this complex.”

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