

Statement of
The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
United States Senate
March 21, 2012

Today, the Antitrust Subcommittee examines the state of competition in the wireless industry. We are focused on the sale of valuable spectrum to Verizon Wireless and related agreements. I look forward to hearing from our panel of witnesses as they assess the merits of the proposed sale and agreements, and the state of competition in the wireless industry more generally.

Strong and vibrant competition in the wireless industry is important for consumers across the country. Competition increases choice, lowers price, and promotes innovation.

Late last year, Verizon Wireless and several cable companies announced a joint venture under which the cable companies would sell Verizon Wireless spectrum licenses, and entered into certain other relevant agreements. This is a significant transaction that will provide Verizon Wireless access to more nationwide spectrum, but will also remove a potential competitor from the wireless market.

The demand for wireless services is at an all time high. Any agreement between Verizon Wireless and the cable industry must ensure that the needs of consumers are met and competition is not threatened. The Department of Justice and the Federal Communications Commission will both examine these transactions, and I have confidence in their commitment to ensure a fair investigation and review.

There is no doubt that putting unused spectrum to use will benefit consumers. In Vermont, a few companies hold portions of our airwaves that are not in use today, including some that are the subject of this proposed transaction. Leaving this spectrum unused means that Vermonters face more dropped calls and fewer wireless options. Regardless of the outcome of this proposed sale, it is critical that this spectrum be utilized in a way that improves service and options for rural customers in Vermont and elsewhere.

I thank Senator Kohl and Senator Lee for their continued efforts to raise the profile of important competition issues, and to ensure that our antitrust laws are enforced.

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