

Statement of

The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
Vermont
May 12, 2004

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Senate Judiciary Committee
Hearing on "The Satellite Home Viewer Extension Act"
Wednesday, May 12, 2004

Mr. Chairman, you and I have worked very closely together on satellite television issues for many years. In November 1997 we joined together to find a way to avoid cutoffs of satellite TV service to millions of homes and to protect the local affiliate broadcast system. In early 1998, working with members of this Committee, including Senators DeWine and Kohl, we forged an alliance behind a strong satellite bill to permit local stations to be offered to viewers by satellite, thus increasing competition between cable and satellite providers. We worked with the Public Broadcasting System so they could offer a national feed as they transitioned to having their local programming beamed up to satellites, and then beamed back down to much larger, new audiences.

I am pleased that John King of Vermont Public Television will testify today about how local-into-local television has benefited Vermonters as well as residents of every other state. He will talk about how VPT is now available in Bennington and Windham counties through the EchoStar Dish Network.

I want all other Vermont broadcast stations to also be available in those two counties. For way too long, Bennington and Windham counties have not been able to receive television news about what is happening in Vermont. If you live in Vermont, hearing about a school fire, a traffic jam, or a flood in Framingham, Massachusetts, is not the same as hearing about a school fire, a traffic jam or a flood in Rutland, Vermont.

By working together, this Committee has made it possible for millions of viewers to now receive all their local network broadcast stations over satellite. Millions of consumers now have a choice between cable service, or Dish Network or DirecTV satellite service. When we started working on this in 1997, millions of viewers across America could not even receive signals from the four broadcast networks over the air.

Because of Vermont's alpine topography, with many towns in the saddles of our mountains, thousands of Vermonters did not receive any Vermont television stations over the air. I want to thank Charlie Ergen whose Dish Network has been offering local-into-local service in Vermont since 2002. Vermont is also looking forward to DirecTV satellite service in the near future.

This Committee, working with other committees in the Senate and the House over the last seven years, has helped create vast viewing options and alternatives for consumers, and has helped expand a tremendous new industry. I intend to work with Chairman Hatch and all members of this committee to go the next step forward as we reauthorize the satellite home viewer act. Our original legislation - the Satellite Home Viewer Act - was a home run. I see our role now as building on that success.

Mr. Chairman, I'm happy to see our satellite bill - S. 2013 - that we introduced with Senators Kohl and DeWine on the agenda for tomorrow's markup. It is important we get this process moving. I understand that we plan to hold the bill over for a week to allow all members to work with us on these important issues. I look forward to joining my fellow Committee members in drafting a consensus substitute bill.

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