STELA Reauthorization: Unclean, Unclean

By: John Eggerton

WASHINGTON — Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.) wasn't sounding like someone ready to pass a clean STELA reauthorization for the sake of avoiding debate about the state of the video marketplace, a debate that in the past has led to a lengthy, contentious process.

A lengthy process would be OK with MSOs, if it results in some reform in retransmission-consent payments.

In advance of last week's hearing on reauthorization of the Satellite Television Extension and Localism Act, Rockefeller, chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee holding the hearing, said that no "final path" for STELA had been determined. "I have learned from my long tenure on this committee that we should seize opportunities that present themselves, not take a pass for another day," he said.

On the House side, Republican leadership has been aiming for a relatively clean STELA bill, deciding to deal with other issues in a broader look at Communications Act reform. STELA has to pass by the end of the year, or it sunsets.

STELA is the law granting satellite operators a blanket license to deliver distant network-affiliated TV stations to subscribers who can't get a viewable signal from their inmarket affiliate. It also renews the FCC's authority to mandate good-faith bargaining in retrans negotiations.

"Dealing with these issues will require the committee to take a close look at today's video market, ask tough questions, and ultimately we may have to make hard choices that may upset incumbent interests," he said.

Rockefeller doesn't have "another day," as he has announced he will not run for re-election.

Perhaps Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.) probably put it best when she said: "Buy a lottery ticket if you think STELA will sail through the Senate."
- See more at: http://www.multichannel.com/news/news-articles/stela-reauthorization-unclean-unclean/373652#sthash.zIEcMUVp.dpuf

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