

HR-607: A Threat Beyond Ham Radio

“**M**agic in the Sky” columnist Jeff Reinhardt, AA6JR, discusses in his column this month the growing influence of the telecommunications industry in FCC frequency allocations. He also suggests strongly that *CQ* readers write to their Congressional representatives, urging them to oppose that portion of HR-607—one of several bills that would establish a national interoperable public safety network—that would mandate the FCC within ten years to auction off to the highest bidders the 420–440 and 450–470 MHz bands.

Jeff’s column prompted me to finally write the letter about the bill that we’d been discussing for quite a while at the office. “At the office” is a key element because our office in Hicksville, New York, is in the district represented by Rep. Peter King, the prime sponsor of HR-607. Our hope is that a letter from a company that has been headquartered in his district for more than 30 years, providing jobs to residents of his district, will at least be read before being filed away with other HR-607 letters.

We also took a different approach than most hams have taken, and even than that which Jeff is suggesting in his column. Since our magazines—especially *Popular Communications*—cover the broad spectrum of radio communications, including user groups that don’t have an organized voice as hams do (such as GMRS and Family Radio Service users), we thought it would be beneficial to point out the impact that reallocating 420–440 and 450–470 MHz would have *beyond* ham radio. After all, the ARRL and hams around the country have done an excellent job of presenting ham radio’s case. Here are the major points of our letter; the full text will be posted on our website:

- The bill erroneously states that 420–440 and 450–470 MHz constitute a “paired” frequency band. We explained that the two bands are currently allocated to entirely different services.

- The primary active user of 420440 is the Defense Department’s PAVE PAWS radar, which is our coastline’s first line of defense against submarine-launched missiles. Since Rep. King is chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, we wanted to be sure he was aware that he was attempting to mandate the relocation of a radar system that is critical to our homeland security. We also pointed out that changing the operating frequencies of all of these radar installations and working out new sharing arrangements with other spectrum users in a new frequency segment would likely cost the taxpayers millions of dollars at a time when we are all trying to rein in unnecessary government spending.

- Also in the area of homeland security, we wanted to be sure that Mr. King was aware that the FCC had recently approved the use of 420–450 MHz by law enforcement reconnaissance robots, after being persuaded by the manufacturer that the robots were most effective at these frequencies. Again, it didn’t seem as though the chairman of the Homeland Security Committee would want to compromise the operation of robots that will likely see use in counterterrorism operations.

- Next, we moved to 450–470 MHz, a band which has received little to no attention from ARRL or others opposing this forced reallocation proposal. The bill would mandate that all public safety users on 450–470—in fact, on all frequencies between 170 and 512 MHz!—move to the 700–800 MHz band in order to

free up this spectrum for eventual auction. We pointed out the enormous financial burden that this would impose on state, county and local governments—and we the taxpayers—again at a time when everyone is trying to reduce unnecessary government spending.

- We also pointed out that there was no mention at all of where the thousands of private land mobile users would go—including the businesses that currently use 450–470—or the financial burdens that would be imposed on mostly-small businesses as a result.

- Furthermore, we reminded Rep. King that the Family Radio Service operates in the 450–470 MHz range, that millions of Americans currently use this service and that, because it is not an individually licensed service, it would be impossible for the FCC to identify or notify all users or to force them to stop using their FRS radios.

- Finally, we pointed out that even without all of the other services that would be displaced, the 400-MHz band is not an ideal frequency range for commercial wireless networks. This is because of the greater distances over which signals propagate on these frequencies (vs. the microwave bands)—meaning greater separation that would be required before a frequency could be re-used - and the possibility of significant interference when weather conditions cause band openings.

We’ll see if this letter has any impact. We doubt it as far as Mr. King is concerned. He is a frequent presence on TV in the New York area, talking about homeland security issues and other matters. Yet his priorities in this matter seem to be elsewhere. Why else would the chairman of the Homeland Security Committee propose a bill that would compromise a major coastal defense radar network and limit the usefulness of surveillance robots in counterterrorism operations? Why else would he attempt to derail his own party’s efforts to rein in government spending by requiring the expenditure of millions of taxpayer dollars on relocating not only PAVE PAWS but a multitude of other public safety organizations? And why else, in these tough financial times, would he impose significant additional costs on thousands of small businesses that rely on radios operating the 450–470 range for conducting their everyday business?

This provision of HR-607 is not only a threat to ham radio, but to homeland security, state and local government budgets, the taxpayers’ pocketbooks, small businesses and the millions of Americans who use the Family Radio Service.

We also sent copies of our letter to the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member of the House Communications and Technology subcommittee, where the bill was referred on introduction, so that they would be aware of our concerns as well. The chairman of this subcommittee is Oregon Rep. Greg Walden, who is also W7EQI, so he should have an understanding of the technical issues involved. Both should have an understanding of the fiscal issues involved.

Dayton

Usually, I use my July editorial to pass along some bit of wisdom picked up at the Dayton Hamvention® or on the trip there or back. This year, though, the calendar is playing tricks on us and we needed to close the issue just *before* Dayton instead of just *after*. So I’ll have to wait until next month to pass along any pearls of Dayton wisdom, as well as our annual report on new products introduced at “the big show.” 73, W2VU

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