

Testimony of Lonna Thompson
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Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
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Chairman Walden, Ranking Member Eshoo, and members of the subcommittee thank you for inviting me to testify before you today on behalf of the Association of Public Television Stations (APTS). The reauthorization of the Satellite Television Extension and Localism Act (STELA) which governs the transmission of local public television signals to millions of direct broadcast satellite (DBS) viewers, is of great importance to the 368 public television stations across the country. This law directly impacts the carriage of our local stations throughout the country and it has tremendous influence on the services that are available to your constituents and our viewers nationwide, particularly those in rural America that are often limited in their Multichannel Video Programming Distributors (MVPDs) choices and disproportionately depend on satellite as a means to receive their paid television programming.

First and foremost, we would like to thank this Committee and the Congress as a whole for the passage of STELA which recognized the critical services that local public broadcasting stations provide their communities nationwide. Because of that legislation, viewers in even the most remote corners of this country that receive local satellite HD service, have access to the best that public television has to offer in in the full splendor of high definition. No longer are customers denied access to the HD presentations of NOVA, Nature, Masterpiece Theater and exceptional local programming, thanks to the work that Congress did ensuring that all satellite providers that carry local HD channels must also carry the HD signals of local public broadcasters.

We are also appreciative of the language that was included in STELA which allows satellite carriers to carry public television statewide licensees' signals throughout the entire state where the DBS providers have the bandwidth to do so. This provision removed statutory roadblocks that restricted the ability of residents and tax payers in states to receive the full benefits of their state's public television statewide network.

Public broadcasting is charged by the Public Broadcasting Act with providing universal service to every corner of this country. We take that mission seriously and we are proud to deliver unparalleled children's educational content, the best in nature and science, in-depth historical and cultural programming, unmatched public affairs programming and some of the finest dramas on television. STELA enabled public broadcasters to meet this universal service mission and provide the highest quality of services to our satellite viewers.

PUBLIC TELEVISION'S PRIVATE CARRIAGE AGREEMENTS

As Congress looks to reauthorize STELA, public television proudly highlights the private carriage agreements that we have been able to negotiate with almost all major MVPDs. Rather than rely on Congress to work out these carriage agreements, which are admittedly challenging, we pioneered our own private agreements with cable, Verizon and DIRECTV.

THE NEED FOR A LEGISLATIVE SOLUTION IN STELA

When I last testified before Congress, before the passage of STELA, we were still hopeful that we would be able to negotiate a similar carriage agreement with DISH. Unfortunately, after years of unsuccessful negotiations, we were never able close a deal with DISH that would have

guaranteed carriage of all of our stations' HD signals. As a result, before STELA was signed into law, DISH was not carrying the HD signal of any local public television station—even in markets where they offered the HD service of commercial broadcasters.

STELA mandated the carriage of local public television stations' HD signals by any satellite carrier that had not entered into private carriage negotiations with public television. Now, DISH is required by law to carry the local HD signals of public television stations in all markets where they offer local HD service. DISH challenged this law in court and we were pleased that the courts upheld STELA.

This provision was included in STELA because Congress recognized the unique educational mission of local public television stations and the void that was felt by citizens that were previously denied access to these critical services.

RESULTS OF STELA PASSAGE

As a result of STELA, viewers in Oregon are able to watch *Oregon Field Guide*, a valuable source of information about outdoor recreation, ecological issues, natural resources and travel destinations in the full beauty of High Definition. In the San Francisco Bay area, subscribers to satellite have access to the HD version of *Quest*, KQED's award-winning multimedia science and environment series. In Ohio, viewers in the Bowling Green area can tune into WBGU's HD programming and watch *Scenic Stops*, the station's new local program that explores what is off the beaten path in WBGU's 19-county viewing area. And in Pittsburg, viewers can tune into WQED and watch the special production of *Pittsburg From the Air* which will take them on an HD aerial sightseeing tour of some of the most visually stunning attractions in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

In Massachusetts, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Tennessee and communities nationwide, Americans can travel the galaxies with NOVA, tune in for a live performance at the Met, celebrate the fourth of July with a front row seat at the Nation's Capital, catch up on the latest drama of *Downton Abbey*, and so much more, all in beautiful display of high-definition television from the comfort of their own living rooms. This is public television as it is meant to be seen and appreciated.

Public television is in the business of providing local public service. We treat our viewers as citizens, not consumers. Our stations provide over 98 % of Americans with the highest-quality, free, educational media available. This includes unique community resources that would not otherwise be available, like unparalleled noncommercial children's educational content, local programming, formal and informal educational instruction for all ages, in-depth news and public affairs coverage and unmatched cultural programming. Thanks to STELA, those services are available to all DBS subscribers, regardless of where they live.

In addition to all the great broadcast services that local public television stations offer, our stations are also providing cutting edge public service to communities beyond the broadcast—particularly in the area of education. These services include bringing multimedia course work and lesson plans to teachers in Oregon; using new media tools to foster financial literacy in ESL classrooms in Northern California; pioneering educational technology in Massachusetts in a way that allows public television stations throughout the country to offer curriculum-aligned, standards-based digital learning objects for use in classrooms nationwide; and producing innovative online and video adult education resources in Kentucky, aligned to the Common Core Standards, that help adults successfully prepare for the GED® test.

Stations across the country are also partnering with their local public safety officials to use their broadcast spectrum to send encrypted information to police and rescue respondents at headquarters

and in remote locations. Many stations are serving as the CSPAN of state legislatures, broadcasting all state legislative activities to viewers throughout the state so that even those in the most remote corners of the country can be connected with their legislators. Stations have also made it a mission retrain the American workforce and serve America's returning veterans, with some stations offering extensive job retraining and certification courses for both veterans and nonveterans.

All of these services and more, are part of the vibrant public service media this country has invested in and we are proud to deliver to your constituents. Because an investment in public media is truly an investment in meeting the unique needs of local communities nationwide.

Again, we would like to thank this Committee, and particularly Representative Eshoo, who authored the amendment which guaranteed our HD carriage, for all your work crafting legislation that recognized the incredible value and critical services that are provided by local public television stations.

Thank you for inviting me to participate in today's hearing. The reauthorization of STELA is critical to all public television stations and we look forward to continuing to work closely with you as prepare to reauthorize this legislation and assess what needs remain.