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Rosenworcel, O’Rielly Stress Importance of Flexible Spectrum Use

FCC Commissioners Jessica Rosenworcel and Mike O’Rielly today stressed the importance of providing flexible use of spectrum as well as employing tools to ensure that bands are being used efficiently.

The Commissioners discussed broad spectrum-management issues at the 15th European Spectrum Management Conference, which was organized by Forum Europe and held via webinar.

Ms. Rosenworcel stressed the benefits of flexible spectrum policies, “robust secondary markets,” the “right mix” of licensed and unlicensed frequencies, the restructuring of “old allocations,” and incentives for incumbents such as federal agencies to use bands efficiently. She also singled out overlay licenses as a useful tool.

“I think you have to recognize these greenfield swaths of spectrum ... probably only exist in our imagination,” she added.

Mr. O’Rielly noted that there are cases where regulators may want to offer incentives for incumbents to relocate so bands can be repurposed, while in other cases, especially if spectrum is being used inefficiently, there would be no incentives.

“I think the real challenge for regulators in this environment is price discovery. In other words, what’s fair compensation to relocate or remove existing users,” Ms. Rosenworcel said.

She said that an incentive auction, such as the one that the Commission used to repurpose 600 megahertz TV spectrum for wireless services, “is a really good way to engage in price discovery. I will also acknowledge it’s complicated.”

As for the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. O’Rielly said that U.S. communications networks are “holding up together pretty well.”

“We just moved into the future really fast,” said Ms. Rosenworcel, adding that the pandemic has made it clear who has broadband access and who doesn’t, how much spectrum is needed, and the impact of network outages.

“My greatest hope is that we learn from this moment,” she added. She also stressed the need to “get a lot more creative about spectrum allocation.” - Paul Kirby, paul.kirby@wolterskluwer.com

