

# TV Station Relocation Could Leave Viewers in the Dark

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## The issue:

Congress should pass legislation to ensure viewers' access to local television stations is not threatened following the broadcast spectrum incentive auction due to a lack of funds or unreasonable time constraints for station relocation.

## Here's why:

When Congress authorized the broadcast spectrum incentive auction, broadcasters were assured that participation was voluntary and stations that did not volunteer would not be penalized.

To this end, Congress authorized \$1.75 billion in the Television Broadcaster Relocation Fund to cover the reasonable costs necessary to relocate, or repack, broadcasters to new channel assignments following this auction. Congress also included a three-year timeline for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to reimburse broadcasters.

Since that time, the FCC has pursued a repacking plan that is likely to cost significantly more and take much longer than envisioned by Congress. The Commission also has imposed an arbitrary 39-month deadline by which television stations must complete their moves or go off the air, leaving viewers in the dark.

There is no way to know for certain how many broadcasters will need to be relocated until the auction takes place; however, based on the FCC's plan, neither the size of the fund nor the repacking timeline will likely be sufficient to allow broadcasters to successfully relocate following the auction. Based on publicly available data, relocating several hundred or more broadcasters could result in costs that exceed the broadcast relocation fund by as much as \$1.25 billion.

Matters outside of broadcasters' control further complicate the process. There will be a small number of qualified crews for modifying broadcast towers, antennas and transmission lines and a shortage of antennas available for purchase. A shortage of manpower and transmission equipment could leave broadcasters unable to meet the FCC's deadline, jeopardizing stations' ability to provide service to viewers.

The FCC should remove the arbitrary 39-month deadline for relocating stations. Once the auction is complete, the Commission should issue an aggressive but realistic timeline for station relocation based upon the number of stations that will need to move and the availability of resources necessary to complete the moves. If the FCC relocates more stations than the \$1.75 billion fund can support, Congress should honor its pledge to hold broadcasters harmless by authorizing additional funding for station moves.

Viewers should not lose their local stations due to arbitrary and unachievable deadlines set by the FCC, nor should stations be left to foot the bill for hundreds of millions of dollars simply because the Commission could not adhere to its budget.