

Capitol Hill

More than 8,400 jobs could be saved or created by enacting the Community Access Preservation Act (HR-3745), American Community Television said in a report released Monday. The group estimated the number using the survey responses of 78 public, educational and governmental (PEG) access managers. The bill by Rep. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis., aims to bolster carriage requirements for PEG channels.

A staff discussion draft of public safety legislation by House Commerce Chairman Henry Waxman, D-Calif., “includes necessary elements for consideration in establishing rules as part” of a broad interoperability framework, FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski wrote him July 20. “Any path forward” on the public safety network “should permit flexibility to identify additional criteria identified through any rulemaking process,” Genachowski said. Waxman's draft bill would authorize a commercial auction of the D-block and give the proceeds to public safety. Interoperability “can be achieved and maintained only through a combination of technology standards, license conditions, network governance, funding conditions and regulations,” Genachowski said. Achieving interoperability also will take compliance by “thousands” of public safety jurisdictions, he said. “While the FCC can utilize its licensing regime and its enforcement authority to bring this about, it will also be very important to condition any grant program on compliance with these important interoperability requirements.” Other federal agencies, including the Justice and Homeland Security departments, must “ensure that the proper procedures are in place so all can be certain of interoperability from day one of this network.” Genachowski said he directed the Public Safety Bureau to issue a public notice “soon” on promoting competition for public safety communication technologies. The document will seek comment on to what degree lack of equipment competition and device availability has hurt interoperability for narrowband voice communications, and how to fix the problem going forward, he said. Public Safety Bureau Chief Jamie Barnett is set to speak about the D-block in a hearing Tuesday of the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Emergency Communications. The hearing will discuss the National Broadband Plan's ideas for public safety, including the proposed commercial D-block auction, the committee said. Other planned witnesses include Greg Schaffer, assistant secretary of the Homeland Security Department; Jeff Johnson, president of the International Association of Fire Chiefs; Charles Dowd, deputy chief of the New York City Police Department; Robert LeGrande, founder of The Digital Decision; and Eric Graham, Cellular South vice president.

Wireline

The U.S. is lagging behind countries like Japan in terms of average broadband speeds and adoption rates, especially among low-income communities, seniors and other disadvantaged groups, FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski said at the Communications Workers of America political convention Monday: “We’ve got work to do.” He cited a recent FCC report finding that up to 24 million residents don’t have access to broadband service (CD July 22 p1). The FCC National Broadband Plan, which set ambitious goals, will be a platform for enhancing the country’s capabilities in healthcare, homeland security, energy, public safety and education and be the foundation of the new economy by stimulating economic growth and job creation, Genachowski said. The commission seeks to work with agencies like Food and Drug Administration to encourage the development of cutting edge and life saving technology, he said, citing his joint meeting with FDA Commissioner Margaret Hamburg. (See separate story in this issue.) Jobs must come first, said CWA President Larry Cohen. He cited the plan’s interim benchmarks for next-generation deployment: Within five years, 100 million U.S. households will have access to 50 Mbps down and 20 Mbps up. This pushes investment and innovation forward, he said. — YW

The FCC should create a national PIN database to aid the distribution of discounts in the Lifeline program, AT&T said. State agencies should verify whether consumers are eligible, the carrier said. The FCC should create a “Lifeline Provider” designation separate from current eligible telecommunications carrier requirements and Section 214 of the Communications Act and not covered by them, the company said. Beth Fujimoto, AT&T's executive director of public policy, discussed the recommendations in a presentation Tuesday, said a filing Friday.