Swift FCC Transisition Needed To Ensure Timely 4G Build-Out

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Less than one month after Barack Obama moves into the White House, the FCC will be overseeing a major airwaves transition that will require TV broadcasters to hand over analog spectrum to wireless carriers who are eager to start building out 4G networks. Wireless carriers recently bought rights to the soon-to-be-cleared spectrum in the FCC’s highest grossing auction yet. The transition will have to go through smoothly in order for 4G network development to get underway. Although the Obama team seems eager to make the transition seamless, so consumers don’t go without TV, it is just as important to clear the spectrum quickly for wireless carriers who spent billions on leasing the airwaves. Verizon Wireless (NYSE: VZ) was the biggest winner in the high-profile spectrum auction, and probably has the most to lose as a battle begins to brew between 4G technologies. While Verizon and others are leaning towards using LTE, they will have to compete against Clearwire (NSDQ: CLWR), which recently got the FCC’s blessing to merge with Sprint’s 4G division, and is already in the process of building out a nationwide WiMAX network. Obama’s transition team head John Podesta recently told reporters that the new administration is keenly aware of the upcoming shift to digital-only television and that it plans to move quickly to confirm new FCC members to see it through, TV Week reports. Some have already, but the remainder of broadcasters throughout the country will be switching to digital-only television on Feb. 17, and it’s sure to be at the forefront of whoever sits on the FCC when and if things go wrong. Podesta declined to say whether the Obama team has immediate plans to replace current FCC Chair Kevin Martin. More after the jump... “We’re focused on the fact that that will be an early challenge and we need to be ready and prepared for that,” Podesta said, according to Multichannel News. “With respect to personnel announcements, I am not going to speculate... I have no doubt that the President-elect will believe that it is important to put his own stamp on the FCC.” National Association of Broadcasters president David Rehr sent a letter to Obama earlier this week, noting that up to 19 million households still rely exclusively on over-the-air TV. In areas were some broadcasters have already cleared analog spectrum, the FCC permitted the early transition if stations were located in cold climates or areas were Qualcomm (NSDQ: QCOM) was waiting to begin rolling out its MediaFLO service in the same spectrum. Related:@ CTIA: Quiet Period Is Ending; Qualcomm, Verizon And Others Address Spectrum Auction Coincidence: Spectrum Auction Slowing; Verizon Raising Billions?