

Mr. Congressman, Tear Down This Wall!

The Full Digitization Of Cellular Phone Service Should Mean The Decriminalization Of Monitoring The Entire Spectrum

It's time. The FCC has greenlighted cellular service providers retiring their analog system—the once so promising Advanced Mobile Phone Service (AMPS)—in favor of far more efficient, and profitable, digital modes. For once, the transition to digital communications, so often the bane of scanner monitors' existence, has presented us with a golden opportunity. As analog cellular service takes its place in communications history, it's time to reclaim what was taken from us beginning with the infamous Electronic Communications Privacy Act (ECPA) of 1986: our right to monitor the entire radio spectrum and to do so without fear of prosecution.

In a stellar example of aggressive political pressure and blatant hoodwinking, the Cellular Telephone Industry Association (CTIA), the lobbying arm of the Wireless Telecommunications Industry, managed to convince the public (Congress was probably easier) that their little slice of spectrum—the frequencies between 824–849 MHz and 869–894 MHz—could be walled off like Berlin, its privacy protected by draconian (did you know that simply listening to a cellular call is a felony punishable by up to five years in prison?), but unenforceable, laws.

Of course, cellular handsets are not your “grandfather’s phones,” tethered to privacy from all but government agencies by land lines. As readers of *Pop'Comm* well know, but the public was duped about, *cell phones are radios*. Their signals reach antennas the way a breeze does. It makes as much sense to criminalize winds between certain speeds.

The ECPA was just the start. Industry and government have been chipping away at our ability to *simply listen* to parts of the radio spectrum ever since. Today it's forbidden to sell new scanners capable of receiving these frequencies. There isn't enough space on this page to go into the twists, turns, and dangerous ruts of the road that got us here (that's the job of our

cover story, “Watching The Analog Sunset”; it makes for fascinating, if maddening, reading).

But the “beauty,” to use a word loosely, of where we are now is that we no longer have to debate individual freedom versus privacy or undue burden versus the CTIA's next argument. When the last analog cellular system shuts down, this absurd law will become something else: pointless. *Consumer-grade full-spectrum scanners can't demodulate the digital modes that are replacing analog cellular, any more than they can on the 1900 MHz PCS bands for which no monitoring restrictions exist.*

Don't get me wrong, this will still take a fight. Never underestimate the power of inertia or of a bad idea entrenched. But it is our best chance since the CTIA started reading off its wish list to its friends in Washington. Contact your Congressional representatives and tell them you want to see these senseless laws amended to respect the pre-1986 wording of the Communications Act of 1934, which served everyone's interest well and still makes sense. It forbade divulging, or profiting from, the contents of privileged non-broadcast radio communications.

We believe the government should never censor our radios or legislate our sense of hearing. Now the government has no reason to.

In Memoriam

Gene Costin, known to hobbyists as Gene Hughes, the name under which he published the renowned *Police Call*, has passed away. He was 80 years old.

A giant in the hobby, Gene's impact in his 41 years of producing *Police Call*, the “bible” of services monitoring, cannot be overestimated. We at *Pop'Comm* extend our deepest sympathies to his family and friends in the humble knowledge that we, too, owe him a great debt of gratitude. Thank you, Gene. ■

POPULAR COMMUNICATIONS

EDITORIAL STAFF

Edith Lennon, N2ZRW, Editor

(E-mail: editor@popular-communications.com)

Tom Kneitel, W4XAA, Senior Editor

Richard S. Moseson, W2VU, Editorial Director

(E-mail: w2vu@popular-communications.com)

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Peter J. Bertini, K1ZJH, Restoration/Electronics

Kent Britain, WA5VJB, Antennas And Accessories

Bruce A. Conti, AM/FM Broadcasts

Gerry L. Dexter, Shortwave Broadcast

Richard Fisher K16SN, Capitol Hill News

Mitch Gill, NA7US, Homeland Security

Tomas Hood, NW7US, Propagation

Shannon Huniwell, Classic Radio

John Kasupski, KC2HMZ, Utility Communications

Kirk Kleinschmidt, NT0Z, Amateur Radio

Ron McCracken, WPZX-486/KG4CVL, REACT

Mark Meece, N8ICW, Military Monitoring

D. Prabakaran, News

Bill Price, N3AVY, Humor/Communications

Ken Reiss, Technical/Scanning

Bob Sturtevant, AD7IL, Puzzles and Trivia

Tom Swisher, WA8PYR, Plane Sense

Jason Togger, KB3CNA, Cartoons

Gordon West, WB6NOA, Radio Resources

BUSINESS STAFF

Richard A. Ross, K2MGA, Publisher

Arnold Sposato, N2IQO, Advertising Manager

Emily Leary, Sales Coordinator

Sal Del Grosso, Accounting Manager

Doris Watts, Accounting Department

CIRCULATION STAFF

Melissa Gilligan, Operations Manager

Cheryl DiLorenzo, Customer Service Manager

Ann Marie Auer, Customer Service

PRODUCTION STAFF

Elizabeth Ryan, Art Director

Barbara McGowan, Associate Art Director

Dorothy Kehrwieler, Production Director

Emily Leary, Production Manager/Webmaster

Hal Keith, Technical Illustrator

Larry Mulvehill, WB2ZPI, Photographer

A publication of



CQ Communications, Inc.
25 Newbridge Road
Hicksville, NY 11801-2953 USA

Popular Communications (ISSN-0733-3315) is published monthly by CQ Communications, Inc., 25 Newbridge Road, Hicksville, NY 11801. Telephone (516) 681-2922. FAX (516) 681-2926. Web Site: <http://www.popular-communications.com/> Periodicals Postage Paid at Hicksville, NY and at additional mailing offices. Subscription prices (payable in U.S. dollars): Domestic—one year \$32.95, two years \$58.95, three years \$85.95. Canada/Mexico—one year \$42.95, two years \$78.95, three years \$115.95. Foreign Air Post—one year \$52.95, two years \$98.95, three years \$145.95.

U.S. Government Agencies: Subscriptions to Popular Communications are available to agencies of the United States government, including military services, only on a cash with order basis. Requests for quotations, bids, contracts, etc. will be refused and will not be returned or processed.

Entire contents copyright © 2008 by CQ Communications, Inc. Popular Communications assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts, photographs, or drawings. Allow six weeks for change of address or delivery of first issue.

Printed in the United States of America.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Popular Communications, 25 Newbridge Road, Hicksville, NY 11801.