

OTTAWA REPORT

By Lois Brown, MP
Newmarket-Aurora

Increasing Competition in the Wireless Sector

The Big Three telecoms ? Bell, Rogers, and Telus ? have launched a public relations campaign to persuade Canadians and our government to change our telecoms policy. Together these wireless operators hold approximately 93% of the Canadian subscriber market and nearly 90% of existing spectrum licenses.

Our government's view has always been clear; we want greater competition across Canada. We are focused on protecting Canadian consumers by enabling sustained competition in the marketplace ? not protecting Canadian companies.

Since 2008, we have introduced new policies to increase competition in the telecommunications industry. The result has been greater choices at lower prices for Canadians. In fact, our actions have driven down the average cost of wireless services by nearly 20%.

This policy was not created overnight. It is the result of a vigorous consultation that started in 2008 and continues today. All players ? industry, consumer groups and everyday Canadians ? contributed to this policy.

The bottom line is that we are committed to ensuring the best possible outcomes for consumers. We want all regions of Canada to benefit from competitive market forces, which is why more progress must be made.

With the upcoming 700 MHz auction, scheduled now for February 2014, the Government has created auction rules that allow any qualifying new entrants and some regional wireless providers to have the chance to acquire adequate 700 MHz spectrum.

The investment and licensing framework for the auction was designed to add much needed competition to the Canadian wireless market. Incumbents can still bid; however, new entrant or regional players are permitted to win 2 ?prime? 700 MHz blocks while incumbents are only allowed to win one. The rules in terms of the spectrum caps established do not discriminate against Canadian companies. Any company that has less than 10% national market share (or 20% of a regional market share, for regional companies) can bid on the 2 prime blocks of the spectrum up for auction.

Our wireless prices are high as Canadian consumers know and as confirmed by Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) data. Our government has concluded that competition from new entrants in the Canadian market can help. We believe the same lower prices and enhanced service coverage experienced in the U.S., which has four national wireless providers, can flow from a Canadian fourth national provider and that the market is sufficiently large to allow a fourth provider to flourish.

With the current rules, fourth players, be they regional players or foreign or domestic new entrants, have a chance to bring increased competition to the market. It is for these reasons that the Government of Canada will continue to stay the course by ensuring Canadians benefit from a competitive telecommunications industry.

Tightening up on Temporary Foreign Workers

The Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) has been tightened up even further with additional changes that came into effect July 31. The new reforms will help ensure that Canadians are first in line for available jobs and that taxpayers no longer pay the cost of processing employer applications for temporary foreign workers. The changes include:

A new \$275 processing fee for each temporary foreign worker position that an employer requests through a Labour Market Opinion (LMO). With the implementation of a fee, employers will be less likely to apply for TFW positions they may not fill, helping ensure taxpayer resources are not wasted.

Mandating that English and French are the only languages that can be identified as a job requirement in advertisements and LMO applications by employers intending to hire temporary foreign workers, with exceptions for rare and specialized circumstances only. Ensuring that employers make greater efforts to hire Canadians before they will be eligible to apply to hire temporary foreign workers. New advertising requirements will double the length and reach of employers' advertising efforts which will increase Canadians' awareness of available jobs.

Adding questions to all LMO applications to ensure that the TFWP is not used to facilitate the outsourcing of Canadian jobs.

These improvements to the TFWP are in addition to those announced in April and will help ensure this program is only used for what it is intended.

If you would like to contact me on any issue, please call 905-953-7515 or visit my website at www.loisbrown.ca. I look forward to hearing from you.