

Full US House Okays Telecoms Bill with BPL Study Language Intact

On a 321 to 101 vote, the US House of Representatives on June 8 passed the Communications Opportunity, Promotion and Enhancement (COPE) Act of 2006. The House-passed bill, HR 5252, leaves intact language that required the FCC to study the interference potential of BPL systems. US Rep Mike Ross, WD5DVR (D-AR), one of two radio amateurs in Congress, sponsored the BPL study requirement, "Study of Interference Potential of Broadband over Power Line Systems," contained in Title V, Section 502 of the complex bill. HR 5252 now goes to the US Senate, where a separate--and very different--telecoms bill, the Communications, Consumer's Choice, and Broadband Deployment Act of 2006 (S 2686) is still in committee.

"We were concerned that a representative might be persuaded by BPL interests to introduce an amendment to delete or dilute Section 502," said ARRL CEO David Sumner, K1ZZ. "As it turns out that didn't happen, although we had taken steps to counter it if it had. So for now our focus returns to the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee." Sumner says that if similar language were introduced on the Senate side, it would be more likely to remain when and if the House and Senate versions go to a conference committee.

Section 502 calls on the FCC to "conduct, and submit to the Committee on Energy and Commerce of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate, a study of the interference potential of broadband over power line systems," within 90 days of the bill's enactment.

The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee will consider S 2686 in a markup session later this month. The ARRL has e-mailed members in the 22 states with Senators on the committee, urging them to write seeking support to include similar BPL study language in the Senate bill.