Mr. Chairman, I agree with the intent of the bill, which is to improve competitive choice for consumers, lower costs, and increase innovation. I hope that is where we will be at the end of this process. However, currently, I have profound concerns about the loss of local revenues, lack of assurances for universal access, and the potential for anti-competitive behavior by network providers.

This comes to the floor with significant problems for local governments. The COPE Act will reduce Public Education Government, PEG, funding for Portland and Multnomah County by $2.4 million each year.

Proponents argue that more competitors will increase local revenues. However, the revenue is based on the size of the customer population, thus more competitors will not necessarily result in more revenue than already exists. This bill also grants new authorities to the FCC to resolve local and private disputes. I am uncertain that the FCC possesses the capacity to effectively handle these local issues.

In the spirit of preserving innovation and providing equal access to web surfers and businesses alike, the Internet must remain a non-discriminatory, egalitarian, and open playing field. This is an issue that has often been referred to as ``net neutrality.'' I am concerned about the ability of the Internet to remain neutral and equal under the COPE Act.

This issue is particularly important to my district in Oregon as it has one of the highest broadband penetration rates in the country. I have received thousands of letters, e-mails, and phone calls from my constituents expressing concerns about the COPE Act's ability to safeguard the neutrality of the Internet. I support the Markey Amendment on network neutrality, which regretfully the House failed to adopt.

Lastly, I am concerned that the COPE Act does not ensure universal access for vital telecommunication services. Without strong ``build out provisions,'' poor and rural areas in the country are at risk of falling behind. Telecom companies will be able to cherry pick the most profitable areas and force cable companies to follow suit in order to remain competitive. History suggests that it is unrealistic to expect one company to continue to invest in all of its regions if a competitor applies market pressure to small concentrated areas.

This bill is the start of a long conversation regarding how best to address telecommunications in this country. It is my strong belief that we will be revisiting the concerns I have outlined should this bill pass, and it is my hope that through the legislative process, we can provide the American people the telecom reform they deserve.