

Low-power radio bill passes key legislative hurdle    Written by Staff Reports    October 8, 2009

The United Church of Christ's media-justice advocacy arm is celebrating a great victory in one of its most important and longest standing legislative efforts in the area of media reform. Legislation that will expand low-power radio to 140 million people who are currently unable to receive it has been approved by the House Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet. "This denomination has been working to ensure community groups around the country can have access to low-power radio stations for over 10 years," said Rev. J. Bennett Guess, the executive director of UCC's media-justice arm, the Office of Communication, Inc. (OC, Inc.)

The Local Community Radio Act, H.R. 1147, was introduced by Congressman Mike Doyle (D-Pa.) and Lee Terry (R-Neb.) most recently during the current session of Congress. The bill would alter a law passed in 2000 that unnecessarily limited low-power radio to rural parts of the country. "I am really delighted to see this bill make it through a key hurdle on its way to becoming law," said Cheryl A. Leanza, Policy Director of OC, Inc. "Our legislative champions, Congressmen Mike Doyle and Lee Terry, have been indefatigable in their support for this important media-justice issue. The support of Congressman Rick Boucher (D-Va.) and his staff in giving this issue his time and attention in a Congress with such a crowded schedule has been critical to assist the thousands of community groups waiting for low-power radio stations." "Expanding low-power radio is a concrete step toward a more just society," said Andrea Cano, OC Inc. Board member and former director of the UCC's Microradio Implementation Project. "These stations give voice to the voiceless."

Low-power radio stations are small FM radio stations that serve a geographic area with a radius of 5 to 7 miles. They are non-commercial stations that can be obtained by community groups, churches, schools and other non-profits. Currently there are about 800 radio stations on the air. In May, a wide range of faith communications leaders, including the UCC, wrote a letter to Congress supporting the low-power radio legislation. After approval by the House Subcommittee, the bill will move to the full House Energy and Commerce Committee, chaired by Congressman Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), a longtime supporter of low-power radio. A companion bill, S. 592, sponsored by Sens. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) and John McCain (R-Ariz.) is pending before the Senate Commerce Committee. Prior versions of the Senate bill have passed through the Senate Commerce Committee three times.

