

Verizon's proposed spectrum deal and joint ventures with several cable companies is a "canary sent into the coal mine" to see if there is any more antitrust "oxygen" left in U.S. regulatory agencies, former Federal Communications commissioner Michael Copps said on Monday.

Antitrust enforcement hasn't been the strong suit for many recent administrations, but Justice Department and FCC decisions to block AT&T's bid to buy T-Mobile last year showed that there may be hope, said Copps, who was a relatively vocal critic of the AT&T deal.

"Why this deal should be so much more difficult than AT&T/T-Mobile is difficult for me to understand," he said at the Freedom to Connect conference in D.C. on Monday. "No matter what you call it--cabal, cartel, collusion, conspiracy in restraint of trade--I don't see how anyone can claim that reducing competition in both wireless and wireline somehow advances the well-being of consumers."

Verizon is seeking approval from the Federal Communications Commission to buy spectrum from a joint venture among Comcast, Time Warner Cable and Bright House Networks, and from Cox Communications as part of a separate deal. Verizon and the cable firms also are seeking Justice Department approval for a cross-marketing deal that involves the firms selling each others' services.

Copps and other argued that deregulation is [making it harder](#) to make broadband more available to Americans.