



Remarks by Harvey Fierstein

Tony Award-winning Writer and Actor

**Delivered at
“Pardon the Interruption”
A Capitol Hill Forum on the Need to
Protect Existing Users of Broadcast and Wireless Microphones**

Hosted by Rep. Bobby Rush (D-1st IL)

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Good afternoon. My name is Harvey Fierstein. I'm going to assume that most of you know me as the guy who called his mother from under the desk in INDEPENDENCE DAY or as Robin Williams' brother who turned him into a woman in MRS. DOUBTFIRE.

But, actually, I'm a BROADWAY BABY. I'm a six-time TONY AWARD winning writer and actor. My shows include LA CAGE AUX FOLLES, TORCH SONG TRILOGY, and HAIRSPRAY. I currently have two smash hit shows running on Broadway, DISNEY'S NEWSIES which won a couple of TONYS last year, and KINKY BOOTS which won six TONY awards this year including BEST MUSICAL.

I'd like to begin by thanking Representative Rush, other distinguished House Members, and your staffs for the opportunity to state our concerns.

Obviously this issue affects the futures of everyone who performs live in front of an audience.

But it's not just about Broadway actors. This issue impacts ENGINEERS, STAGEHANDS, MUSICIANS, and PRODUCERS all across North America.

Our ability to present live theatrical entertainment affects many ancillary industries such as HOTELS, RESTAURANTS, SOUVENIR SHOPS, BARS, TAXIS, and the countless other service industries surrounding live theater venues.

- In New York, Broadway is a \$12 billion dollar a year industry. That's more income than what all of our professional sports franchises generate put together.
- Broadway provides nearly 85,000 jobs in the metropolitan area.
- Broadway attracts more than 12 million tourists from around the world.

But this isn't just about New York City. Every year, Broadway shows tour more than 200 North American cities bringing professional theater to countless fans. And along with those shows come jobs and income.

Touring performances contributed THREE AND A QUARTER BILLION DOLLARS to the National economy last year. The city of Chicago alone took in \$500 million.

And now to the point of my visit:

No industry relies on wireless microphone technology more than we. Modern audiences, raised on Dolby sound in theaters and surround-sound from their own televisions, demand a full aural experience in the live theater. Wireless mics have revolutionized what we can do onstage. Thanks to their ever-shrinking size, we can dance, swing, and leap about without sacrificing sound quality.

And the technology isn't just for the actors. Wireless systems have become an integral part of how shows operate backstage. *KINKY BOOTS* alone uses 66 transmitter frequencies. Orchestras use them. Stagehands and stage managers need them to run the performances. And with ever more complicated stagecraft, wireless microphones are key to keeping everyone safe and in touch.

If I can just give you a quick snapshot of how it all works:

- To prepare a new Broadway show, a SOUND SPECIALIST consults the FCC's database to learn what TV transmitters are in operation near the theater.
- The technicians then use analyzers to find stray signals that might cause interference.
- They must also take into account what wireless systems are in use by other productions close by.
- After gathering all of this information, the technicians then run specially designed software to calculate which frequencies are available for their new show.

Once in the theater, it can take days to choose the best antenna locations and fine-tune the system settings. Even then technicians must continue to manage and adjust the equipment on an almost daily basis. After all, shows open and close. News trucks and film crews can show up right outside the theater...

It's an ever-changing "White Space" landscape.

Our microphones operate on extremely low power and are very susceptible to interference. It's no exaggeration to say that the incentive and spectrum auctions would significantly threaten the frequency spectrum available to our engineers. Representative Rush's proposal guarantees two SAFE HAVEN CHANNELS and expands PART 74 LICENSING to include professional wireless microphone users, which will streamline access to the FCC's geo-location database for live theater while having little impact on the other industries competing for the wireless spectrum.

We would be delighted to work with Congress and the FCC to develop a reasonable, mutually satisfactory solution for this problem. However, we do not believe that selling off the wireless spectrum—before a thorough assessment of how the live entertainment industry will be impacted—is in the best interest of the country. Certainly, it would be detrimental to us and our audiences.

After all, no one wants to be watching the lovely Audra McDonald open her mouth to sing and instead hear my voice boom out from a production across the street.

I know you'll keep that in mind as you confer. Thank you again for hearing us out.