

Uncle Sam, Ma Bell and Her Babies: A Timeline

1982

JANUARY

AT&T and the Department of Justice sign a consent decree ending the Government's antitrust suit against the company. The decree calls for AT&T to divest itself of its 22 local telephone operating companies; in return, the Government agrees to let AT&T enter previously restricted businesses.

AUGUST

The consent decree is modified to prohibit the Baby Bells from manufacturing equipment or offering long distance and "information services" like electronic publishing.

DECEMBER

AT&T files its reorganization plan in Federal court, spelling out its breakup in detail.

1984

JANUARY

The AT&T divestiture takes effect.

JULY

Judge Harold H. Greene, *below*, announces guidelines for granting the Bells waivers of the rules that forbid them from entering certain businesses. In December he grants the first waivers.

1985

JULY

The Commerce Department's telecom-policy branch calls for an end to the court-ordered business restrictions.

NOVEMBER

In the House, Tom Tauke, Republican of Iowa, and Al Swift, Democrat of Washington, introduce a rider to a trade bill that would let the Bells enter manufacturing and information services. Receiving no broad support, the measure is dropped.

1986



JUNE

Senator Robert Dole, Republican of Kansas, *above*, with support of several Bell companies and the Reagan Administration, introduces a bill to transfer oversight of the AT&T consent decree from Judge Greene to the F.C.C. Hearings are held, but momentum is lost after the November elections.

1987

AUGUST

The F.C.C. scraps rules that limit phone company profits. Consumer groups oppose say the plan would end rate reductions and limit competition.

SEPTEMBER

Judge Greene rejects a Justice Department proposal to remove most of the Bells' business restrictions.

1988

MARCH

Judge Greene agrees to let the Bells offer voice mail and E-mail services, and transmit electronic publishing for others, but not provide content.

NOVEMBER

The Senate introduces a bill to let the Bells make equipment. A version passes in June 1991, but a similar measure in the House never makes it past the committee stage.

1989

JUNE

Judge Greene refuses to allow the Baby Bells to offer electronic directory services. A seven-year ban on AT&T's entry into electronic publishing is allowed to lapse.

1990

JULY

The last hand-cranked party line manual telephone service in the United States—serving 18 residents of Salmon Creek Canyon, Idaho—is replaced with modern electronic switched service.

1991

MAY

Judge Greene removes the information services restriction from the Bells, but leaves in place the rules against manufacturing and long-distance service.

1992

MAY

Representative Jack Brooks, Democrat of Texas, introduces a bill to turn the Bells' consent decree restrictions into law, including reinstatement of the information services ban. The bill never makes it to the House floor.

1993

AUGUST

A Federal court in Virginia lifts the video programming ban contained in the Cable Television Act of 1984, which barred telephone companies from providing cable service.

1994

JUNE

The House overwhelmingly approves legislation that would let the Bells make equipment and enter the cable and long-distance businesses in return for accepting competition in their local telephone markets.

SEPTEMBER

A comparable Senate bill collapses in the Senate under opposition from several Bells, which maintain that it would subject them to too much competition from cable and long-distance companies before they could respond.



1995

JUNE

The Senate passes a bill, sponsored by Larry Pressler, Republican of South Dakota, *above*, to overhaul communications regulation. It would let the Bell companies, long-distance carriers and cable operators compete in one another's businesses, and would also deregulate cable rates and raise limits on how many TV and radio stations any one person or company can own. The bill would make it illegal to transmit pornography over the Internet.

AUGUST

The House passes a communications bill that is similar to the Senate version—but with mere guidelines for policing pornography on the Internet. Other issues left for a House-Senate conference committee to resolve include the rules by which the Bells could enter long distance, the pace of cable rate deregulation and the extent to which media companies would be allowed to own a mix of newspapers, broadcast stations and cable systems in a geographic market.

DECEMBER

The conference committee struggles to reach a consensus that can pass.



Sources: BellSouth and AT&T



AT&T