

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 25, 2008

The Honorable Kevin J. Martin, Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Martin:

We write to express our concern with the Federal Communications Commission's digital television (DTV) transition consumer education plan. While public awareness of the DTV transition has increased as we come closer to February 17, 2009, the Commission has failed to provide the American public with adequate information concerning the need for new antennas and/or antenna adjustments to receive digital broadcast signals. Based on information from the Wilmington test results, national surveys, and the DTV switchover in the United Kingdom, we have no doubt that without proper attention to antennas a significant number of Americans will experience problems viewing digital broadcast signals over the air.

We commend the Commission for running the early, test DTV transition in the Wilmington, North Carolina market on September 8th to provide an example of what to expect on a national basis on February 17, 2009. On the day of the test transition, over 20% of the calls to the FCC hotline were from consumers experiencing reception and technical problems, many of which were due to a lack of an adequate antenna or placement of an antenna. We note that, in total, the number of calls (794) to the FCC hotline concerning the Wilmington test on September 8th amounted to less than .5% of the region's households. On a national scale of 112.8 million television-viewing households, that amounts to 564,000 calls, with 20%, if not more, reporting antenna-related problems. In addition, we highlight that reception in the Wilmington, NC market, which has relatively flat geography, is not comparable to reception in more problematic mountainous terrain for digital signals. Furthermore, we are concerned that the level of preparation provided by the FCC, the community and the industry in anticipation of the Wilmington test was much higher than we will see on a national level for the February 17th transition. Accordingly, we believe that the percentage of Wilmington households that experienced a problem receiving a digital signal due to antenna problems, while significant, is far below what can be expected nationwide in February.

As for national studies, Centris reports that over one-half of the over-the-air only households in the United States are located in challenging reception areas due to terrain, antenna location and signal blocking objects like buildings and trees. Centris's research "forecasts that 24 percent of consumers in difficult reception areas who only have an indoor antenna or a small or medium omnidirectional antenna likely will not receive any channels, and a further 10 percent will receive only one channel."

The United Kingdom started implementing its DTV transition by region last year. After completing a test transition in November 2007 in Whitehaven, Digital UK, the organization tasked with administering the DTV transition in the U.K., wrote in an April 2008 report that up to 35 percent of consumers will need to add or make modifications to their existing antenna in some communities.

With this overwhelming amount of evidence demonstrating that over-the-air reception of the digital signal relies heavily on having an external antenna and placement of that antenna, it is imperative that the FCC step up its consumer education campaign concerning antennas. We urge the FCC to take the following actions immediately:

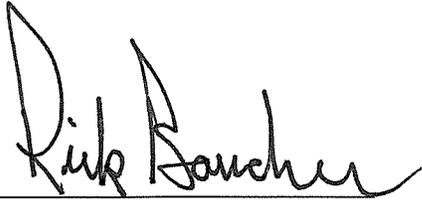
- Establish a public/private/non-profit sector information campaign which focuses on the need for new antennas or adjustments to existing antennas to receive digital TV broadcast signals.
- Encourage Americans to act now to buy and install a DTV converter box, test the reception, and then take action to resolve any problems as soon as possible.
- Update information on the FCC's website and other related DTV websites to include in an obvious, accessible location a clear explanation of antenna matters.
- Expand the FCC's call center, especially in the weeks prior to and proceeding the transition, to address questions concerning antenna matters.

In addition, we encourage all stakeholders in the DTV transition, including other federal agencies, broadcasters, cable and satellite television providers, and retailers, to include as part of their DTV transition consumer education campaigns information about the potential need to add or adjust an antenna for digital reception.

In less than five months, millions of American households may find that they can no longer receive over-the-air broadcast television, regardless of whether they have purchased a digital converter box or a digital television. For so many Americans, access to television is a crucial part of their everyday life, providing not only entertainment, but local and national news and information, including crucial public safety alerts. Every effort must be made to ensure that Americans are prepared for the DTV transition with the proper equipment, including antennas, to receive a digital television signal.

We thank you for your prompt attention to this matter and look forward to your response and action.

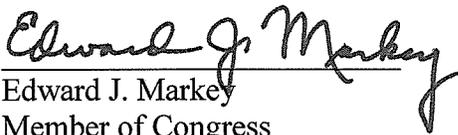
Sincerely,



Rick Boucher
Member of Congress



John D. Dingell
Member of Congress



Edward J. Markey
Member of Congress



Charles A. Gonzalez
Member of Congress



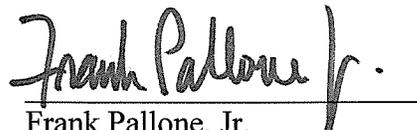
Jay Inslee
Member of Congress



Baron Hill
Member of Congress



Edolphus Towns
Member of Congress



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress



Bart Gordon
Member of Congress



Bart Stupak
Member of Congress


Lois Capps
Member of Congress


Barbara Cubin
Member of Congress


Heather Wilson
Member of Congress

cc: Michael J. Copps, Commissioner
Jonathan S. Adelstein, Commissioner
Deborah Taylor Tate, Commissioner
Robert M. McDowell, Commissioner
Meredith Baker, Acting Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications
and Information, National Telecommunications Information Administration,
Department of Commerce
David K. Rehr, President and CEO, National Association of Broadcasters