

## SUBCOMMITTEE ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND THE INTERNET HEARING ENTITLED, "STATUS OF THE DTV TRANSITION: 252 DAYS AND COUNTING"

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Washington, D.C.

— Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI), Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, delivered the following statement this morning at a Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Internet hearing titled, "Status of the DTV Transition: 252 Days and Counting."

I wish to welcome our witnesses to the fifth oversight hearing on the digital television (DTV) transition before this Subcommittee in the 110th Congress. The DTV transition is one of the most important telecommunications issues facing the Committee this year, and time is running out.

In 252 days, millions of analog television sets in this country will stop receiving full-power broadcast television signals. While broadcasters, cable providers, retailers, and others have undertaken significant efforts to educate consumers, far too many remain unaware of and ill prepared for the transition.

When 54 percent of households have inadequate or no plans for the transition, despite being at risk of losing service, it demonstrates that there is still much to be done before February 17, 2009.

Certain recent developments with respect to the DTV transition are the focus of today's hearing. Last month, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced a test market for the DTV transition in Wilmington, North Carolina. On September 8, 2008, most commercial broadcasters in the Wilmington market will go all-digital, ahead of the national transition deadline of February 17, 2009. I hope this test market will help identify the issues that may need to be addressed before the rest of the Nation

undergoes the DTV transition next February.

Next, a recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) consumer survey found that 35 percent of over-the-air only homes and 52 percent of homes with at least one unconnected analog television set are unprepared for the transition. Those numbers suggest that much work remains to educate consumers, including seniors, non-English-speaking households, and other vulnerable populations.

Finally, the first DTV converter box coupons have already begun to expire, allowing some insight into redemption rates for the converter box coupon program. It is my hope that this data will assist us in determining whether more money may be needed for this program.

These recent developments raise a number of important questions:

Will funding for the TV Converter Box Coupon Program be sufficient, or will some consumers be left without assistance?

How will NTIA and IBM facilitate the changeover from the first phase of the TV Converter Box Coupon Program, in which any household can apply for up to two coupons, to the second phase, in which coupons are restricted to only over-the-air households?

Will the FCC and NTIA have sufficient resources to educate consumers in every community to the same extent as was done in the Wilmington test market? If not, how much of an actual indicator for the nationwide transition will this test market be?

What resources are available to assist consumers who may need in-home assistance to set up their converter boxes?

If consumers hook up their converter box and it fails to deliver digital signals, how will they know whether the converter box is broken or if a new rooftop antenna or some other technological fix is needed?

In some viewing areas, a broadcaster's digital signal will cover different areas than the broadcaster's current analog signal. How will consumers know if they fall inside a broadcaster's analog footprint, but outside of its digital?

These are only a few of the many questions that remain about the transition, and we need to have answers if the transition is to succeed. I urge the witnesses to address these and other pending matters in their testimony. I thank our witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to working with all of you to resolve the many issues we still face.

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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