

Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet hearing entitled, "Status of the DTV Transition: 154 Days and Counting."

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September 16, 2008

I welcome the witnesses to this Subcommittee's sixth hearing on the digital television (DTV) transition. As I have said before, the DTV transition is a critical consumer issue facing the Committee this year, and it is essential that we continue to address outstanding issues as February 17, 2009, draws closer.

Just over a week ago, stations in Wilmington, North Carolina, transitioned to digital. I commend local stations, cable, satellite providers, the DTV Transition Coalition, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for their efforts. This DTV transition test revealed many problems, including consumers who could not connect converter boxes to televisions, did not know they needed to rescan their boxes to search for new channels, or did not know they needed to obtain or adjust antennas to receive digital signals.

In Wilmington, the FCC paid the fire department to make house-calls to help connect converter boxes. I look forward to hearing from Chairman Martin whether the FCC expects to provide such assistance Nationwide. If not, I call on the FCC, NTIA, the DTV Transition Coalition, State and local governments, community organizations, consumer groups, retailers, manufacturers, broadcasters, cable and satellite providers, and others with a stake in the transition, to work together to ensure that appropriate information and, when needed, in-home assistance are available to those who need help setting up converter boxes and acquiring or adjusting antennas. I also call on broadcasters to inform viewers if they will not be maximizing their digital signals until after the transition. We cannot afford to have a repeat of the problems from Wilmington when the Nation transitions in February 2009.

I am pleased this hearing will address issues raised by Ms. Solis's DTV Border Fix Act. Both the culture of the border region and the fact that households there can often receive U.S. and Mexican over-the-air

signals are unique. These are also some of the poorest regions in our Nation, making the coupon subsidy even more important to them. I will ask both the FCC and NTIA to pay special attention to this region in their consumer education efforts and look forward to working with Ms. Solis to ensure that we meet the needs of these communities.

I am also interested to hear more from Assistant Secretary Baker about NTIA's proposed legislation for additional administrative funds for the converter box coupon program. I would like to hear why, if NTIA was prepared to recycle expired coupons, it did not budget sufficient administrative funds for that purpose. I also reiterate what I have written to NTIA before — that we cannot balance this planning error on the backs of consumers. I am deeply disappointed that NTIA's proposal is drafted so that each dollar spent to make up for NTIA's administrative shortfall is a dollar taken away from the funds set aside to provide coupons to households that need them.

Just 154 days remain until February 17, 2009. We are entering the home stretch. It is crucial that we quickly resolve outstanding issues relating to the transition so no household is left behind. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding today's hearing.

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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