

Chairman Dingell at the Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet hearing entitled "Oversight of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and Innovations in Interoperability"

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND THE INTERNET HEARING ENTITLED "OVERSIGHT OF THE NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION AND INNOVATIONS IN INTEROPERABILITY"
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Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this important oversight hearing. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce is the Executive Branch's expert agency on telecommunications and information services. As such, it is important that NTIA come before this Committee to offer its insights into the state of telecommunications in our great Nation.

First, I am curious to know what specific policies the Executive Branch has put in place to serve the telecommunications needs of all Americans. For example, does NTIA believe that everyone in the country has access to universal, affordable, and robust broadband services? If not, what specific action is NTIA taking to fill in the gaps? In the past, NTIA has produced meaningful research into the digital divide and the level of minority media ownership. I would like to know why these efforts have fallen off in recent years.

Second, I am interested in NTIA's stewardship of the digital television transition converter box coupon program. All of us would like to see the transition take place on time. NTIA, however, took more than a year to release rules for the program, and the rules contain a major defect. Ignoring the Congressional debate and conventional wisdom about the cost and difficulties with eligibility restrictions, the rules restrict the latter portion of the funding to over-the-air households only. As a result of this short-sighted approach, millions of Americans, whose analog sets will no longer work after the transition, could be denied participation in the coupon program. NTIA's decisions will prove an important measure of how successful the transition will be for American families. If the Administration believes it will take additional funding to prevent televisions from going dark by the Government-mandated transition, it should make such a request to the Congress.

Third, I have concerns about NTIA using its role in working with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) to better promote an effective, open, and transparent process for all parties for the governance and security of the Internet.

The second panel in today's hearing addresses public safety communications interoperability. The need for interoperability was vividly displayed during the devastating destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. In 2005, as first responders rushed to the Gulf Coast in the terrible aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the need for reliable communications among first responders from across the country became an immediate and real issue witnessed by all of America.

The Department of Homeland Security has been funding efforts for interoperability for several years. After \$3 billion and five years, some progress apparently has been made at the local and State level. But I believe not enough progress has been made. We need a more forward-looking and innovative approach to a problem that has persisted for too long.

I thank the Chairman for holding this hearing, and I look forward to the testimony of the witnesses.

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(Contact: Jodi Seth, 202-225-2927)

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515