

Dingell, Markey Request Reports from FCC, NTIA on Funding Needs for Digital Television Coupon Program

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NEWS RELEASE

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Rep. John D. Dingell, Chairman

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Washington, D.C. – Reps. John D. Dingell (D-MI), Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and Edward J. Markey (D-MA), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet, today requested quarterly reports from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) on the funding needs for the digital television (DTV) converter box coupon program.

Citing high demand from consumers during January, the first month consumers could apply for coupons, the two lawmakers wrote the NTIA and FCC, asking them to provide quarterly projections on whether the current funding will be sufficient to cover requests from all households. Each family or household is eligible for two \$40 coupons, each of which can be applied toward the cost of one converter box.

"We have a responsibility to ensure that consumers receive the help they need to prepare for the transition to digital television," said Dingell. "Judging from the rate that consumers are applying for coupons, it is unclear whether the funds currently allotted for the converter box coupon program will, in fact, cover all requests. Quarterly reports from the NTIA and FCC will help us determine whether the program needs additional funding and adjust accordingly — before it's too late."

"Ensuring that the coupon program will be able to meet the demand of consumers who currently depend on analog television signals is critical to a smooth DTV transition. Congress needs to work hand-in-hand with the NTIA and FCC throughout the next year to meet this goal and the quarterly updates we are requesting will be indispensable in gauging our progress and need for future action to protect consumer welfare. When most analog broadcasting ends next Feb. 17th, no consumers should be left behind," said Markey.

On February 17, 2009, full power television stations will stop broadcasting in the traditional analog format and switch to all-digital transmissions. Consumers who currently receive television signals via rabbit-ear or rooftop antennas will need to acquire a digital-to-analog set-top box to continue receiving these signals.

Read the letter

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Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce
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