

Chairman Dingell at the Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet hearing entitled, "Status of the DTV Transition: 370 Days and Counting"

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

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND THE INTERNET HEARING ENTITLED, "STATUS OF THE DTV TRANSITION: 370 DAYS AND COUNTING"
February 13, 2008

Today we again address an issue that will soon affect millions of American households -- the digital TV (DTV) transition. We are just over a year away from the end of the transition, and much remains to be done. Consumers must be properly educated. Both the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the several industries that stand to benefit handsomely have responsibilities in this regard. As February 17, 2009, nears, we learn of new steps that must be taken, and time is running short.

The FCC has recently requested \$20 million for DTV consumer education in fiscal year 2009. I still find this amount, however, woefully inadequate for an educational campaign that must reach more than 300 million Americans.

Chairman Martin has also circulated an Order regarding consumer education in response to a letter sent by Chairman Markey and me. I commend the Chairman for moving forward on this important matter and look forward to agency action on this question.

This week, Chairman Markey and I, joined by 19 of our colleagues, sent a letter to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) concerning reissuing converter box coupons to consumers whose original coupons have expired. The 90-day coupon expiration date is a cause for concern because consumers might be unable to find stores with boxes in stock before their coupons expire. I understand that Ms. Baker and the NTIA, along with their vendor IBM, are working to solve this problem, and I thank them for their efforts.

We must be mindful of the situation confronting low power broadcasters. Only full power broadcasters are required to transition to digital next year -- low power and translator stations may take more time. This means that in some markets, some stations will be broadcasting only in digital after February 17, 2009, while other stations will continue to broadcast in analog. The potential for confusion appears high for those consumers that acquire a digital converter box and then are not able to receive analog channels.

I applaud those manufacturers who have included an analog pass-through feature in their converter boxes to address this problem, as well as those who are in the process of adding this feature. I urge NTIA to quickly approve these boxes. I also expect low power and translator stations to do their part to educate their viewers about the need to purchase a converter box with analog pass-through capabilities.

Finally, some of the biggest beneficiaries of the DTV transition are the Nation's retailers. The converter box coupon program will plow more than one billion dollars into the stores of eligible retailers. Some consumers will choose to buy new televisions instead of converter boxes, and many will purchase other items, such as CDs or video games, while they are in a store using their coupons. For retailers, the DTV transition will certainly be profitable. I therefore urge the industry

to be vigorous in its efforts to properly educate consumers.

I am told that as of yesterday, Wal-Mart no longer has analog-only televisions on its shelves, and last year Best Buy pulled all analog stock from its stores. Radio Shack has agreed to ship converter boxes to consumers free of charge and will remove all analog sets from its stores by March 1. I applaud these pro-consumer decisions.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to the testimony.

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce
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