



THE SECRETARY OF COMMERCE

Washington, D.C. 20230

June 15, 2007

The Honorable Herb Kohl
Chairman, Special Committee on Aging
United State Senate
Washington, DC 20510-6400

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your letter about the need to ensure that America's seniors are properly provided for in planning for the transition to digital television (DTV) in February 2009. I welcome the opportunity to provide you with information regarding our ongoing work to keep households including or headed by seniors informed about the approaching transition. The Digital-to-Analog Converter Box Coupon Program will be a critical component to ensure the transition occurs smoothly and successfully.

The Department of Commerce (DOC) takes very seriously its responsibilities regarding the DTV transition and has taken significant steps to ensure the success of the Coupon Program. The DOC's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) is responsible for executing this program and has made it a top priority. I enclose a fact sheet that describes some of NTIA's outreach efforts to ensure that seniors are sufficiently aware of the upcoming transition and its implications.

NTIA has taken the necessary actions to establish a strong program. It has hired highly qualified people to be Coupon Program Director and Director of Consumer Education and Public Information. The agency is in the final phase of procuring the services needed to create awareness of the coupon program, distribute coupons to millions of American households, certify retailers nationwide, and responsibly reimburse retailers. NTIA intends to implement the most effective and creative public communications and outreach efforts to address precisely the issues you raise.

The success of the Coupon Program will require the participation of a large number of institutions and organizations across the country to assist seniors in many ways. These include understanding all options, helping seniors apply for the coupons, and assisting with installation of the television converter once it is purchased. NTIA is actively developing training materials for community-based organizations and is in discussions with groups interested in community service to engage them in assisting older Americans with the digital transition.

The DOC is well aware that seniors are often the target of scams and fraud. The program will include comprehensive security and risk mitigation components designed to avoid waste, fraud, and abuse. NTIA will work closely with groups serving the senior community to provide consumer friendly tips and advice on avoiding scam artists. NTIA has reached out to AARP and Consumers Union to seek their participation in publicizing information for seniors to avoid fraud. We will also publicize consumer hotlines, such as those maintained by the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Trade Commission, so that seniors can call if they may be the victims of fraud.

Working together, I am confident that we can make the digital transition a success for all Americans. If you have any further questions, please contact me or Nat Wienecke, Assistant Secretary for Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, at (202) 482-3663.

Sincerely,

Carlos M. Gutierrez

Enclosure

**Fact Sheet on NTIA's Outreach Activities for Seniors about the
Digital-to Analog Converter Box Coupon Program**

- NTIA, working in cooperation with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), has already taken significant steps to increase awareness among the general public about the DTV transition and educate the public about the various aspects that may impact them. Both the <www.DTV.gov> website and NTIA's website, <www.ntia.doc.gov/otiahome/dtv>, provide significant information about all aspects of the transition and the Coupon Program.
- In addition, NTIA has undertaken a number of activities specifically intended to address the special needs of America's senior community. NTIA's strategic plan has identified two goals that are especially relevant to reaching seniors: (1) focus consumer education resources on households likely to lose all television service, and (2) leverage resources through partnership to maximize engagement among diverse stakeholders.
- NTIA will focus its consumer education resources on households likely to lose all television service and leverage resources through partnerships to maximize engagement among diverse stakeholders. To reach those most likely to be affected by the digital transition, NTIA has identified five target groups for its Consumer Education efforts: (1) older Americans, (2) the economically disadvantaged, (3) rural residents, (4) people with disabilities, and (5) minorities.
- NTIA is reaching out to public and private organizations serving seniors to raise awareness about the Coupon Program and to prepare them for the transition.
 - Specifically, NTIA is working closely with AARP (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons) to ensure that the Coupon Program will be highlighted in their publications and online newsletters. *AARP The Magazine* reaches 22.5 million members and *AARP Segunda Juventud* reaches 400,000 members.
 - NTIA is also working with the American Library Association to distribute posters and coupon applications to participating libraries, and to train librarians to help seniors apply for the Coupon Program. NTIA will provide a link to be placed on library terminal home pages that will enable seniors using the library computer to go to the coupon application page to apply while online.
 - NTIA will partner with SeniorNet, an organization that supports about 200 senior learning centers across the country, to provide information about the Coupon Program to seniors through those centers.
- NTIA will also leverage relationships that other government agencies and departments have with seniors:

- NTIA is inviting departments and agencies to use their existing publications and electronic newsletters to insert coupon information in scheduled mailings, link to the coupon application form from their websites, put coupon applications at local social service offices where seniors might visit, talk about the program at meetings and conventions, and utilize all existing communication opportunities with seniors to inform them of the Coupon Program.
 - NTIA has already reached out to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Stamp Program, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Social Security Administration, Veterans Affairs, Department of Education's Faith Based Office, General Services Administration, Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, and the Administration on Aging.
 - NTIA will continue to expand its group of government contacts throughout the year and expects to reach millions of households including or headed by seniors through these initiatives.
- NTIA and the U.S. Department of Commerce are actively seeking opportunities to reach seniors and organizations representing them through meetings and publications designed for seniors. During the recent National Cable and Telecommunications Association convention, NTIA Assistant Secretary Kneuer participated on a panel hosted by Retirement Living TV designed to raise awareness among seniors of the upcoming digital transition.
 - In addition, Mr. Kneuer will be writing and submitting an article for publication later this year in the National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors (*NATOA Journal: Promoting Community Interests in Communication*) that reaches large numbers of seniors and other organizations that serve seniors. The article will be timed to remind seniors of the coupon program just as the converter boxes arrive in the stores.
 - NTIA staff will continue to attend meetings and conferences over the next year spreading the word of the transition and the government program designed to offset the cost of the converter boxes. For example, NTIA will participate in the White House Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Conference in August and the AARP Convention in September and other major conferences focused on our target groups.
 - NTIA will also work to assist seniors with special needs to enable them to take advantage of the coupon program. Specifically we will reach out to private and public organizations serving the home-bound or seniors with other special needs. Organizations that provide home health care, meals on wheels, senior day care, and other elder care services will be a particular target of our efforts.

- Brochures, flyers, posters, and applications will be printed in English and Spanish and other languages as appropriate. Manufacturing groups have pledged to produce information about the coupon program in multiple languages.
- NTIA intends to make the application process as simple and straightforward as possible for consumers. We will encourage seniors to apply over the phone using a toll-free number. They will also have the option to use the Internet or mail or fax their applications. The actual coupon application will be straightforward and will be market tested to ensure it is understandable and friendly to consumers.
- Likewise, NTIA will make the process to use the coupon to purchase a converter box as simple as possible. NTIA will work with retailers to simplify their processes and encourage retailers to accept phone orders from consumers to meet the needs of the home-bound. NTIA will provide a list of retail outlets selling the converter boxes, including online retailers, and also a list of approved boxes that can be purchased with the coupon.