

June 5, 2009

The Honorable Michael J. Copps
Acting Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Acting Chairman Copps:

One week from now, on June 12, 2009, our nation will transition to digital television, or DTV. As you know, on this day, full-power television stations across the country will cease broadcasting in analog and will switch to digital signals. This change will require millions of households to take action if they wish to continue to receive free, over-the-air television.

In order to provide consumers, government, and the broadcast industry with adequate time to prepare for the transition, earlier this year I introduced the DTV Delay Act. As a result of the passage of this legislation, I believe the nation is better prepared for the upcoming switch to digital broadcasting. In the last several months, we have made great strides in readying households across the country for the DTV transition. Since enactment of the DTV Delay Act, the coupon program at the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has issued 10.4 million new coupons. The disastrous waiting list for coupons that this Administration inherited from its predecessor, which at its height had 4.2 million coupon requests, has been fully addressed. Today, no such waiting list exists. In order to help consumers better manage the transition, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has awarded 45 contracts that establish over 12,000 walk-in DTV help centers across the country. Finally, statistics from The Nielsen Company demonstrate that as of mid-December, the number of completely unready households was 7.75 million or 6.8 percent of all television households in this country. By late May, this number fell to 3.1 million, or 2.7 percent of television households. As a result, the number of completely unready households has been reduced by 60 percent.

Despite this significant progress, I am concerned that millions of consumers are still unaware of the transition and are unprepared for its consequences. In particular, I fear that too many households lack the in-home assistance they may need to secure converter box coupons, acquire converter boxes, attach them to their sets, and obtain a new television antenna, if necessary. In addition, I worry that we may soon face converter box shortages, if not nationally, then regionally. I am concerned, too, that a dramatic surge in calls during the next week will challenge the ability of both the NTIA and FCC call centers to provide consumers with the help they need to manage the switch to DTV.

As a result, I ask that you address my concerns by responding to this letter in advance of June 12, 2009. Furthermore, I seek assurances that the FCC will continue to assist consumers who need help in the weeks following the transition. Finally, I wish to note that television is not only about entertainment, but provides vital news and information that keeps us connected to our communities and the world. So I trust that you understand how important it is that in the DTV transition, no household is left in the dark.

Sincerely,

SENATOR JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER IV