Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

January 28, 2009

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H - 232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C.

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

Now that S. 328, the Senate's DTV-delay bill, has failed to gain sufficient support to pass without bypassing the regular procedures of the House of Representatives, all of us have work to do. The DTV transition program is neither stuck nor broke. There are problems, but they can be overcome with your help and a dollop of real bipartisanship.

A solution recommended by the Commerce Department currently exists in the form of H.R. 661. That bill or similar legislation will help television viewers without jeopardizing public safety, and it constitutes the most realistic chance for a real broadband stimulus without spending an extra $650 million.

H.R. 661 authorizes $250 million more for converter box coupons. It would clear the waiting list in just two weeks. We might even get most of the money back at the end of the program in coupons that people choose not to use. The legislation is based on the proposal the Commerce Department outlined in a Jan. 14 letter to Democratic and Republican leaders in both chambers of Congress.

It will finally give public safety officials the broadcast frequencies we promised them 10 years ago so they can save lives, and it lets wireless providers actually use the spectrum they've already paid $20 billion to get.

Mr. Stearns and I, along with eleven of our colleagues, are sponsors of the pending legislation, but it hardly matters whose name is on any bill that constitutes a strong, bipartisan solution to the DTV dilemma that both political parties face equally. More to the point, passing the Commerce Department's recommended solution will require your leadership and your party's active support. Getting the job done in time cannot be about laying blame or gaining credit, but about making the transition work.

We were working with Congressman Markey the first week of January on a bill to address the issues without throwing a monkey wrench into the program by stalling the transition. Had that work not been interrupted by the transition team's intervention, it seems likely that a bipartisan bill could have been through the House and the Senate already. We don't have much time left to pick up the pieces, but that's what we need to do, and your direct involvement and support right now can make all the difference.

Sincerely,

Joe Barton
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce

Cliff Stearns
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Communications,
Technology and the Internet

cc: Henry A. Waxman
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

Rick Boucher
Chairman
Communications, Technology, and the Internet