



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Telecommunications and
Information Administration
Washington, D.C. 20230

MAR 5 2009

The Honorable Joe Barton
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Barton:

Thank you for your cosigned letter of February 18, 2009, describing developments in the transition to digital television and suggesting certain actions to smooth the way for consumers. Specifically, you: (1) express concern regarding the backlog of requests for converter box coupons; (2) express concern regarding the potential for consumer confusion as to when the digital transition will be completed in their viewing areas; and (3) encourage measures to help ensure that consumers who rely on over-the-air television and/or live in areas where the digital transition will be completed before June 12, 2009 obtain converter boxes in a timely manner. Information responsive to your letter is detailed below.

DTV Coupon Waitlist

As you know, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) administers the TV Converter Box Coupon Program (Coupon Program), which assists households in their purchase of digital-to-analog converter boxes for analog televisions not connected to a pay television service such as cable or satellite.

You note in your letter that the Coupon Program is filling requests from a waiting list that had grown to 4.2 million coupons from 2.8 million households. I am happy to report that starting March 3, NTIA has begun liquidating the wait list using funds appropriated through enactment of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) on February 17, 2009. The Coupon Program anticipates that the entire current waiting list will be liquidated within the next three weeks. NTIA is taking steps to further maximize future distribution of coupons and to ensure that coupons for those households currently on the waiting list are delivered as quickly as possible. All coupons are now being sent via first class mail.

Consumer Education on Timing of Transition Completion

One of NTIA's primary objectives with regard to the DTV transition has been to help ensure that consumers know their options on how to make the transition to digital television. To that end, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has published a list of stations transitioning on or before February 17, 2009, and NTIA will update its public webpages (www.DTV2009.gov and www.ntiadtvtv.gov) as the FCC provides new information with regard to the planned timing of termination of full-power analog broadcast signals in specific markets.

NTIA also plans to incorporate enhancements in its communications and consumer education efforts to assist consumers who seek information about when their local television stations will terminate analog broadcasts.

Ensuring Coupon Availability for Over-the-Air Reliant Consumers and Early Transitioning Markets

NTIA agrees that special focus should be placed on households solely reliant on analog over-the-air broadcast television and households in markets that intend to eliminate analog over-the-air television broadcast service prior to the June 12, 2009 deadline. To that end, in the remaining months of the DTV transition, the Coupon Program's consumer education efforts are focusing even more on those who have not yet taken any action whatsoever to receive broadcasters' digital signals. As you suggest, we are using our consumer outreach, websites, and other initiatives to encourage those households at a greater risk of losing all television service to apply for coupons as quickly as possible.

The Coupon Program has also requested estimates from its contractor to determine the feasibility of prioritizing consumer requests for coupons from those consumers who rely on over-the-air television and/or in areas completing their DTV transition prior to the June 10, 2009 deadline. I am pleased to report that NTIA is moving quickly to modify its coupon processing systems to implement one or both of these capabilities as soon as possible.

If you have further questions about the Coupon Program, please do not hesitate to contact me or Jim Wasilewski, NTIA's Director of Congressional Affairs, at (202) 482-1551.

Sincerely,



Anna M. Gomez
Acting Assistant Secretary
for Communications and Information