

Statement of  
Chairman Edward J. Markey (D-MA)  
House Subcommittee on  
Telecommunications and the Internet  
Hearing on the Digital TV Transition  
February 13, 2008

Good Morning. Today we are 370 days away from a significant milestone in the history of television. This morning's hearing will give us an important status check on our progress toward a successful, consumer-friendly transition.

The government's coupon program has begun and already this year some 2.5 million consumers have requested coupons toward the purchase of converter boxes valued at roughly \$190 million. Retailers are stocking such converter boxes on shelves for coupon redemption imminently. The broadcast and cable industries have stepped up to air public service announcements and engage in consumer outreach as well.

The details of the national plan to effectuate this transition were embodied in a budget act in the last Congress and were not endorsed by many Members on the Democratic side of the aisle, including myself and Chairman Dingell. Nevertheless, we are committed to trying to make this plan work. Toward that goal this

Subcommittee intends to continue vigorous oversight of the DTV transition, and to work closely with our Republican colleagues, to ensure success.

Today there are several issues at the moment that merit our attention. First, we are eager to be reassured that the converter box program and redemption process is working smoothly.

Second, because the signal characteristics of digital transmission and the anticipated geographic coverage area for individual broadcasters are different than for analog television, many consumers may not receive the digital version of channels they currently receive after the switch. It is important to know how many such households will be affected by this and the extent to which households may need to adjust, or acquire, antennas to receive digital signals.

Third, there are hundreds of low power television stations and thousands of translators that will not be converting to digital in February of next year. It is still unclear how many communities and how many television households will be affected by this. In addition, only a small percentage of the approved converter boxes permit the so-called “pass-through” of the analog signals so that consumers can easily see both digital and analog television in markets where some broadcasters will convert and others won't.

It is vital to ensure that steps are taken by the FCC and the NTIA to coordinate on these matters with the affected industries so that the consumer education and outreach efforts effectively guards against widespread consumer confusion in these communities.

Finally, I want to commend several major retailers for taking action to limit consumer confusion. It has been my concern that analog-only televisions remained on the shelves of major retailers and could result in consumers unwittingly purchasing a TV set due to need additional equipment in a little over a year. Best Buy has already voluntarily removed its analog inventory from the shelves and RadioShack is poised to do so by March 1<sup>st</sup>. In addition, I have this announcement to read from Wal-Mart today:

"Although retailers are not prohibited from selling TVs with an analog tuner, Wal-Mart believes it is important, consistent with congressional concern and counsel from Chairman Markey, to remove the very small number of TVs with an analog tuner from our inventory. This is consistent with Wal-Mart's early commitment to the NTIA converter box program and to otherwise facilitating transition to all-digital television broadcasting. We are currently working with Return Centers and the Wal-Mart Foundation to determine the best way to handle the remaining inventory, which, was extremely small - approximately 1/10th of 1% of existing television inventory."

This statement is effective as of yesterday, so I want to commend Wal-Mart, Best Buy, RadioShack and other retailers for taking this welcome step.

Again, we have many issues to discuss and examine and I want to thank all of our witnesses for their willingness to attend this morning and look forward to their testimony. #####