ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Washington, DC 20515–6115

JOHN D. DINGELL, MICHIGAN
CHAIRMAN

November 7, 2008

Mr. Robert Iger
ABC Entertainment Television Group
500 South Buena Vista Street
Burbank, CA 91521

Dear Mr. Iger:

We appreciate all that broadcasters are doing to educate consumers about the digital television (DTV) transition, including airing public service announcements about the transition and voluntarily agreeing to make Wilmington, North Carolina, a DTV transition test market. The Wilmington test revealed many problems related to the transition, including consumers who (1) did not know they needed to rescan their boxes to search for new channels after the switch, (2) needed to obtain or adjust antennas to receive digital signals, or (3) were no longer able to receive a station's signal because the station's digital signal contour differs from its analog coverage area.

Because one goal of the Wilmington test was to identify and correct problems related to the transition, we are interested in the lessons that Disney-ABC learned from the test and steps it plans to take to avoid similar problems when the rest of the Nation transitions to digital on February 17, 2009. To better gauge the extent to which the transition is on track, we respectfully request answers to the questions below. Please submit your responses to us by Friday, November 14, 2008.

Thank you in advance for your time and attention to this request.

Sincerely,

John D. Dingell
Chairman

Edward J. Markey
Chairman
Subcommittee on Telecommunications
and the Internet

Attachment

cc: The Honorable Joe Barton, Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Cliff Stearns, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet

RESCANNING CONVERTER BOXES

What are your stations doing, or what, specifically, do they intend to do to let viewers, including viewers without ready access to the Internet, know that they need to rescan their digital-to-analog converter boxes after February 17, 2009?

ANTENNA ISSUES

1. If a viewer cannot receive certain local digital signals using a digital-to-analog converter box, how is that viewer supposed to determine that she needs to obtain a new antenna or adjust an existing antenna to correct the problem?

2. What are your stations doing, or what, specifically, do they intend to do to let viewers, including viewers without ready access to the Internet, know that they may need to obtain a new antenna or adjust an existing antenna to receive over-the-air signals after February 17, 2009?

SIGNAL CONTOUR ISSUES

In Wilmington, 735 of 2,272 calls—one-third of all calls received about the test transition—related to loss of one station's signal due to a significant difference between the signal's analog service area and its digital service area. Many stations' digital signal coverage areas will differ from or be smaller than their analog service areas because they cannot immediately maximize their digital signals, they are changing from a multidirectional to a unidirectional antenna, or the new digital service area does not exactly replicate their current analog service area, or for other reasons.

1. How many of your stations have digital signal coverage areas that are smaller than their analog signal coverage areas? For those stations, please identify each station and its market and detail the amount of service coverage loss as a percentage of households in the station's current analog service area.

2. How many of your stations will have digital signal coverage areas that do not exactly replicate their analog service areas and will result in more than two percent of existing households not being able to receive the new digital signal? For those stations, please identify each station and its market and the amount of service coverage loss as a percentage of households in the station's current analog service area. Please also indicate if such station will also gain households in its digital service area not currently reached by its analog service.

3. If a viewer cannot receive certain local digital signals using a digital-to-analog converter box, how is that viewer supposed to determine that this is because the station's digital signal contour is smaller or coverage in certain areas is weaker than its analog signal contour and coverage strength? In other words, how will the viewer know that she resides within the analog signal contour, but outside the digital signal contour?

SIGNAL CONTOUR ISSUES (Continued)

4. What are your stations whose digital signal coverage areas are smaller than their analog signal coverage areas doing, or what, specifically, do they intend to do to let affected viewers, including affected viewers without ready access to the Internet, know that they should expect to lose a particular station's signal after the DTV transition because the station's digital signal contour is smaller than its analog signal contour?