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ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

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

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September 18, 2008

DENNIS B. FITZGIBBONS, CHIEF OF STAFF
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AND CHIEF COUNSEL

The Honorable David Obey
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
H-218, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable José E. Serrano
Chairman
Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government
Committee on Appropriations
Room B-300 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Obey and Serrano,

We are now less than 6 months from the nationwide digital television (DTV) transition. On February 17, 2009, shortly after a new President is inaugurated, full-power television broadcast stations will turn off their analog signals forever and transmit only digital signals. Because television is the predominant medium through which Americans receive critical public safety information and is one of the chief conduits for news and political discourse, as well as entertainment, the most fundamental aspect of the DTV transition is ensuring that consumers are prepared.

While the February 17, 2009, transition will bring tremendous benefits to all Americans in the form of increased over-the-air viewing options and the freeing-up of spectrum for new wireless services and improved public safety communications, many Americans must take proactive steps to ensure that their televisions will continue to work after the transition. Consumer education, particularly efforts led and mandated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), is therefore vital to the success of the transition.

The Honorable David Obey
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Last year, we were pleased that both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees set aside \$2.5 million of the Commission's fiscal year 2008 budget for consumer education about the DTV transition. In so doing, the House Committee on Appropriations properly recognized the challenges faced in educating all Americans about the transition, particularly those in disadvantaged communities, including the elderly, the disabled, and minority groups. The Senate Appropriations Committee expressed similar concerns regarding the need for more consumer education.

This year, the Administration initially recognized the need for a dramatic increase in education about the DTV transition and budgeted an additional \$20 million boost for the FCC towards that effort. Though this additional amount will not be enough to ensure that everyone is fully prepared for the transition, it represents a vast improvement in the FCC's DTV transition resources, and one we must support. In particular, this additional money will greatly assist efforts to educate the elderly, disabled, and Latino households, particularly along the U.S. border with Mexico.

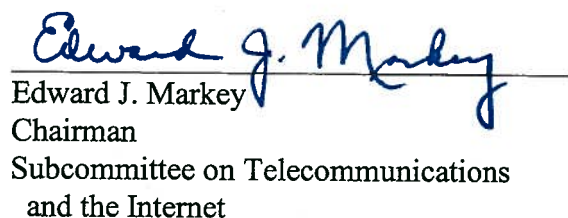
If, however, as part of the Continuing Resolution, Congress only funds the Commission at existing levels, the Commission will be unable to avail itself of those funds before the February 17, 2009, transition date. Under this unfortunate scenario, there is a very real risk of failing to educate properly all our citizens about the transition.

Congress should take every possible step to ensure a smooth DTV transition. Therefore, we request that the House Committee on Appropriations make provisions in any Continuing Resolution for the Commission to receive an additional \$20 million for DTV transition consumer education, so that the Commission may take appropriate steps before the transition.

We thank you for your consideration. Should you require any additional information, please contact us or Amy Levine with the Committee staff at extension 6-2424.

Sincerely,


John D. Dingell
Chairman


Edward J. Markey
Chairman
Subcommittee on Telecommunications
and the Internet

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

The Honorable David Obey
The Honorable José E. Serrano
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The Honorable Cliff Stearns, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet