

**Remarks of Commissioner Michael J. Copps  
DTV Consumer Education Workshop  
Focusing on Consumers in Rural Areas and Tribal Lands  
January 31, 2008**

Good morning. Welcome, all of you, to this important and urgently-needed discussion. My colleagues and I are grateful for your going to the time and trouble to be here today.

February 17, 2009 is one year and eighteen days away. We're not prepared for that day. And, on the current trajectory, we're not going to be prepared one year and eighteen days from now, either. And I know many of you come from areas that are going to be particularly challenged, and we've got to do better by you.

Here's where we are: consumer outreach is just shifting into first gear. The FCC doesn't have its consumer education Order out yet. Most Americans have no idea of what, specifically, this is all about. The subsidized set-top box program could run out of boxes long before everyone who needs a box has one. A Consumers Union survey released yesterday revealed that even people who know about the DTV transition are massively confused—over half (58%) believe all TVs will need a converter box to function and nearly a quarter (24%) believe that all analog television sets have to be thrown out. Others probably think the converter boxes will give them high-definition programming.

The messages are also confused—some are telling satellite subscribers they're OK, but they're not OK if they don't have local-into-local service, because without a box they could lose their local news and information. And many of the boxes won't pass through analog signals, which could be especially important to those consumers served by LPTV, Class A, or translator stations—none of which are subject to the full-power deadline. We don't even tell people what to do with the boxes when they get them: should they hook them up now and will they lose programming if they do, or should we all wait for the Cinderella hour at midnight on February 17, 2009 to hook the boxes up—and hope they don't turn into pumpkins?

Everyone in this room shares the goal of making sure no television viewer wakes up to a blank screen on February 18 of next year. But we don't have a strategy, we don't have the coordination, and we still don't have the right sense of urgency about making it happen. We aren't treating this transition as the national priority it should be. I was heavily involved in the Y2K effort when I was Assistant Secretary of Commerce during the previous Administration. I know what a national commitment and a strategy and a sense of urgency look like. They don't look like this! In Y2K, we had a comprehensive, public sector-private sector partnership with accountability, clear lines of authority, and daily coordination at the highest levels. That's what is needed here. That's Job 1-- commitment.

Job 2 is to do a better job of consumer education. There's been some progress on general consumer awareness—and that's good—but as Consumers Union reported yesterday, there's still a lot of confusion out there about what consumers should do—and should not do—to protect themselves. So we desperately need a coordinated consumer education plan—particularly for communities such as those you represent—that will ensure that the American people are prepared for the switch-over. This should be a partnership. I salute the many broadcasters who are working, some very hard, on this—but we need the synergies and lessons-to-be-learned and even the economies of scale that can come from a concerted, coordinated effort.

Job 3 is to make sure broadcasters and their equipment are ready to go on February 17, 2009. Hundreds of stations are not yet ready for the transition and many will need major construction or equipment upgrades over the next year.

Job 4 is the need to run some tests in a few spots around the country before we get the whole country in a mess. It worries me to think we will turn off every full-power analog broadcast signal in the country on a single day without running a test market or a demonstration project first. Such testing would provide invaluable lessons that would help make February 18, 2009 run much more smoothly. We could see what messages are working and which are not. What technical problems are encountered by broadcasters and consumers—and goodness knows there are always unintended consequences to almost everything we do—and thereby make any necessary mid-course corrections. You know, even Broadway shows open on the road to work out the kinks before they go big-time. Why can't we rehearse this before opening night?

Job 5 I've already alluded to—only 3 of the 32 converter boxes currently certified are able to pass through analog TV signals. That's particularly important for consumers in rural and Western states that often rely on translator service, or consumers who rely on LPTV or Class A stations. Those stations do not have to turn off their analog signals on February 17, 2009. So how do we educate consumers in those areas? Will they know which models to purchase and how user-friendly will they be to use? I would welcome your ideas on how we should address this issue.

There's more to do, but you get my drift. We have a daunting amount of work to do over the next year, and there is a role for all of us – government, industry and private citizens. Working together that way is how we always overcome our greatest challenges. That's exactly what we need to do that here—work together, coordinated, cooperatively, smartly, both the private and the public sectors.

So good luck on your deliberations. Give us your ideas today. And when you return home, spread the message as best you can, get people informed now, and keep pressuring us to do our part to bring some common sense and leadership into this great challenge. It's late, very late, but hopefully not too late.