

**REMARKS OF COMMISSIONER JONATHAN S. ADELSTEIN  
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FOCUSING ON RURAL AREAS AND TRIBAL LANDS**

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Over the past few months, the Commission has invited key constituencies to workshops, like this one today, to discuss how the national transition to digital TV uniquely affects their respective communities. These workshops are helpful to develop strategies on how the Commission can better meet your needs.

While I believe these meetings should have taken place well over a year ago, their importance has only *increased* as the days remaining in the transition have *decreased*.

With only 383 days left in the transition, time is literally running out and there is plenty of work to do. The committed and talented staff of our Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau under the leadership of Cathy Seidel is certainly up to the task. But it seems to me that the Commission has not provided you with the institutional support many of you need to educate and assist the most vulnerable members of your communities.

Just yesterday, we saw two new studies about the progress of educating the American people. The good news is that people are in fact becoming more aware of the transition. A survey by the National Association of Broadcasters found that 79 percent of consumers reported that they have “seen, read, or heard something” about the February 17, 2009 DTV transition.

The bad news is that there is still a lot of confusion that could lead to widespread panic if the government does not take a more proactive role. Consumer Union’s survey found that 74 percent of *those who are aware* of the transition have major misconceptions. They still have a lack of awareness about what the transition means and what they need to do – or not do – to get ready for it.

According the Consumer Union survey,

- more 58 percent of consumers believe that all TVs, including digital TVs, will need a converter box;
- forty-eight percent (48%) believe that they will need digital TVs to be able to watch television after the transition; and
- twenty-four percent (24%) of consumers believe that they will have to throw away their analog sets.

So we truly have a lot of work to do. But it will only get done when all stakeholders are talking and working together to create a comprehensive and coordinated plan. The Government Accountability Office has said that the FCC does not have a plan to guide the nation through a smooth transition.

The FCC needs to present a comprehensive strategy -- a DTV State of the Union -- about how it plans to provide better guidance to the American people. We need to coordinate and work closer with the broadcast, cable, satellite and consumer electronic industries to ensure that no household is left confused by the DTV transition. The word is getting out, but we need a more coherent message to align the mixed signals people are getting.

While some may disagree with that assessment, I believe we – federal, state, local, and tribal officials, along with community leaders – need to develop a strategy that includes a coordinated message and a coordinated plan. Today’s workshop, like others like it, is an opportunity for us to do just that.

As a native of South Dakota, I have a personal understanding about the imperative for us to better appreciate the situation facing Americans living in rural areas and Indian Country.

You have unique concerns that need to be and addressed and resolved by working together. How are rural residents going to get converter boxes when if they are nowhere near a retailer and don’t have Internet access? Who will help the elderly and those with disabilities in remote areas to hook up their boxes? There’s no plan in place for any of this.

Another example, an issue that I hope you talk about today, is how we educate the millions of people in rural and tribal areas who rely on over-the-air broadcast signals that are delivered by analog translators, or analog transmission facilities of Low power and Class A broadcast stations.

Nearly all of the converter boxes that have been approved by the federal government do **not** pass through analog signals. That gives us a tough job to target those families that will need to cope with the complexities of equipping their TV sets with the capability to receive both analog and digital signals.

Perhaps the simple message that analog broadcasting will end forever on February 17, 2008 is not the most appropriate message for your community.

So please use today’s workshop as an opportunity to address this and other issues concerning the DTV transition in rural America and Indian Country. Please challenge our assumptions; ask the tough questions; tell us when we’re not addressing the needs of your community; and let us know how we can do a better job.

With 383 days left in the transition, we must get this done right.