

Remarks of Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate
To Chicago Senior Citizen Conference
May 8, 2008

Good Morning. I am so glad to be here, and so glad to see so many of you! I bring you greetings from Chairman Martin, who regrets he was unable to be with you.

At the Federal Communications Commission there is one date circled on all of our calendars—February 17, 2009. That’s the date of the Congressionally-mandated DTV transition, the greatest television advancement since the advent of color tv. Just 285 days away!

As I’ve been speaking literally all across the country – and even internationally – about the DTV transition, there are a couple of questions that I am always asked. Let me start with those.

I. Why DTV Transition

First, why are we going through the DTV transition? The most basic answer is because Congress mandated it back in 2006. There are a variety of reasons Congress made this decision, perhaps none more important than the desire to improve communications between public safety officials in times of crisis, such as a terrorist attack or a natural disaster like Hurricane Katrina. The spectrum that broadcasters will give back as they transition from analog to digital broadcasting, will allow for true interoperability between all segments of our public safety community.

In addition, this spectrum will be available for new consumer uses, such as video over mobile phones and new wireless devices. The Commission is in the midst of a lengthy testing process to determine the types of devices that will be able to operate on the newly-available spectrum.

Digital television also provides better picture quality and sound. Millions of Americans are already enjoying the benefits of the transition because they've bought a new digital television or they've connected their older model television to a TV converter box. I'll tell you more about how you can get a converter box in just a moment.

Finally, another benefit of digital broadcasting is the ability to multi-cast-- provide multiple digital programs on the same amount of spectrum previously used for just one analog channel. So the channels you watch will not only be clearer, there will be more of them.

I must note here that the DTV transition is only a mandate for full-power broadcasters- not low-power. The full-power/low-power distinction is based on the power of the signal the broadcaster sends. Low-power broadcasters, often found in rural areas, will not be required to transition from analog to digital by February 17, 2009, though many of them have done so anyway, in order to take advantage of the many opportunities digital broadcasting offers.

II. Who is Affected

The second question is who will be affected by the DTV transition? Answer: anyone who receives their television signals over the air using an analog tuner. A good rule of thumb is that any television that was purchased more than 5 years ago, probably has an analog tuner (rather than a digital tuner). Televisions with an analog tuner cannot receive digital signals—unless they are connected to a pay-tv service like Comcast cable, DISH network, or DirecTV. If you are unsure whether you have an analog or digital tv, you can contact the manufacturer or your local electronics retailer.

Approximately half of all American households that have televisions still have analog-only sets in at least one room in the house. According to the Consumer Electronics Association, about 13 million households receive their TV programs via an antenna. If older model, analog sets aren't in the living room, they may be in a guest room or the basement—I know the Tate's have certainly moved tv sets from one room to another over the years! It is important that citizens understand the need to prepare every set in their home for the upcoming transition. Any set you have that is analog will no longer receive full-power broadcast signals – unless it is hooked up to cable or satellite.

As I said, if you subscribe to a pay-tv service, such as Dish, DirecTV, or cable providers like Comcast, your television will continue to work, regardless of whether it is analog or digital. However, every (analog-only) tv must be hooked up to that service

in order to work. So, if you are like the Tate's, and have cable only on one or two tvs, you need to be sure the others either have a digital tuner, or a converter box.

III. How Do We Prepare

The third question, naturally, is how do we prepare? Like so many revolutionary changes, the success of this transition depends on coordination, commitment, and most importantly, education. At the FCC we have a DTV Task Force, which continues to hold forums to target specific segments of the population most at risk during the DTV transition—from low-income communities, to non-English-speakers, to individuals with disabilities. And, of course, America's senior population. In an effort to reach every citizen, in every corner of America, the FCC has produced educational materials in 14 languages, Braille, large print, and audio formats. There is also a sign-language video available for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Personally, I speak about the DTV transition everywhere I go—from various state broadcasters associations to new and nontraditional partners like the boy scouts, AARP chapters, nonprofits like Meals on Wheels programs. In addition, retailers like Best Buy, Radio Shack, and Circuit City are training their employees on how to best assist you when you go to their stores to purchase a converter box. And we welcome your advice about other organizations and ideas for outreach. I firmly believe that this on-the-ground, targeted approach to outreach and education will help us achieve our

goal of a seamless transition -- in which every American wakes up to find February 18, 2009 a day like any other.

IV. NTIA Converter Box Program

The FCC's partner in the DTV Transition, the NTIA (National Telecommunications and Information Administration), is also conducting a massive outreach campaign. NTIA is responsible for administering the Converter Box Coupon Program. This program allows those of you with analog-only televisions receiving programs via an antenna to apply for two \$40 coupons to be redeemed at your local electronics store for converter boxes that will hook up to your set to receive digital signals. Connecting a converter box to your older model analog TV today will allow you to begin enjoying the benefits of better picture and sound. You don't have to wait until February 2009!

NTIA began sending out coupons in late February. According to the Department of Commerce, as of last week, 13 million coupons have been requested, and more than 650,000 households have bought coupon-eligible converter boxes. There are 83 certified boxes, and they range in price from \$50-80. If you wish to apply for a coupon, there is information available online or by calling 1-888-DTV-2009. In fact, if you go to NTIA's website, there's even a quiz you can take to determine if the TV converter box is the best option for your home.

A word of caution, however—the converter box coupons expire 90 days after issuance. You can't get a coupon now, and wait until next January to redeem it. Be sure you pay careful attention to the date on the coupon and redeem it at your earliest opportunity.

V. Key Partners

I must say a word about the great work our industry partners have been doing to help ensure a smooth transition for all Americans. The National Association of Broadcasters has voluntarily pledged \$1 billion for public service announcements and other outreach efforts. Likewise, the National Cable and Telecom Association has pledged \$200 million for consumer education. You have likely seen some of the PSAs run by your local broadcasters or cable operators reminding your community that the DTV Transition is coming.

Other organizations, such as Retirement Living TV, are joining the effort by focusing on their specific target audiences. RLTV has been instrumental in providing informative and educational programming for seniors concerning the digital transition through PSAs, televised specials, and episodes of their technology program *Retired & Wired* hosted by Bill Rafferty, on which I recently appeared with Meredith Baker, the head of NTIA, to discuss the DTV transition.

At the FCC we are aware that there are major portions of our society that depend on over-the-air broadcasts for weather, sports, politics, community events, and most

importantly, emergency alerts. We cannot leave them in the dark, which is why your involvement is so critical. We must all work together to make educational materials available to seniors; we must hold seminars and forums in their communities to explain the steps they need to take to be ready; and we must continue to remind them how soon this change is coming.

The FCC, NTIA, government leaders across the country, and those of you here today are responding to the call for leaders to step forward and take action. Thank you for your efforts and I look forward to working with you as we approach the DTV transition on February 17, 2009.