



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

October 6, 2009

The Honorable Candice S. Miller
Member, U.S. House of Representatives
48701 Van Dyke Avenue
Shelby Township, Michigan 48317

Dear Congresswoman Miller:

Thank you for your July 1, 2009 letter concerning reception problems that many residents of the 10th Congressional District in Michigan have experienced since the June 12, 2009 digital television (DTV) transition. I appreciate and share your concern about these problems. The loss of TV station reception to viewers is a serious concern. Please be assured that the Commission is continuing to explore remedies to help ameliorate coverage gaps to the extent technically feasible.

In developing the DTV service plan, the Commission sought to ensure that TV stations' digital coverage areas replicate their analog coverage areas as closely as possible. The DTV service plan also is designed so that viewers generally will be able to use the same antennas for digital service as they used to receive analog service. Leading up to the June 12 DTV transition, some television stations in this country were not operating at their final facilities. However, reception of signals from most stations has improved as they have commenced operations at their full post-transition power, antenna height, and transmit patterns. Many of the lingering reception problems are a result of the nature of digital broadcasting. Where viewers residing at extreme distances from broadcast facilities once could receive weak analog signals as a snowy picture, a weak digital signal is likely to register as a pixilated picture or black.

Based upon the staff's examination of the TV stations serving the 10th District, it appears that many of your constituents are located more than 50 miles from the nearest stations in either Detroit or the Flint-Saginaw-Bay City region. At such distances, DTV signal strengths, similar to analog TV signal strengths, are at relatively weak levels and would, as a minimum, require rooftop antennas. With rooftop antennas, most residents of Port Huron should be able to receive acceptable digital signals from all major network affiliates (ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC, and PBS), where most residents of Port Austin might be able to receive acceptable digital signals only from CBS and PBS affiliates. However, reception in these two cities and all other areas is highly dependent on individual locations and receiving systems, including antenna set-ups. Farther up the thumb of Michigan, particularly in Huron County, our information suggests that most residents are well outside of the predicted reception areas for any local DTV stations.

To assist in illustrating this, I am enclosing the Commission's DTV coverage maps for stations in the two market areas. These maps show the final predicted reception areas for each station. The maps also show predicted differences between the analog and digital coverage

areas. You will see that most stations actually increased predicted coverage areas following the transition, but much of the thumb of Michigan remains outside of the predicted coverage areas.

Subsequent to the end of analog service on June 12, some TV stations across the country have indicated interest in increasing power to improve their DTV service and to reach additional viewers. The Commission is working with these stations to permit power increases on a permanent or experimental basis whenever such changes would not result in new interference to the service area of another TV station. However, the situation in your Congressional District is complicated by its proximity to Ontario, Canada. Many of your constituents can receive Ontario stations, and these stations must be protected from harmful interference from Michigan stations, just as Michigan stations must be protected from harmful interference from Ontario stations.

For those of your constituents who believe that they might be able to gain better reception of the local Michigan TV stations with a new antenna, they should be aware that it is necessary to use an antenna that is capable of receiving both VHF (channels 2-13) and UHF (channels 14-51) signals. In some cases, digital reception can be improved simply by changing the location of the existing antenna. Moving it away from other objects and structures, or placing it higher, often can improve reception. We also recommend that your constituents re-scan their digital TV receivers or digital-to-analog converter boxes periodically to maintain reception from any existing stations that may have changed channels, or receive new stations that recently commenced operation.

I am enclosing copies of two consumer advisories that provide information on how to use antennas to receive DTV service and to resolve reception difficulties that may occur. These advisories are titled "Antennas and Digital Television" and "Troubleshooting Guide for Digital-to-Analog Converter Boxes and Digital Televisions," and are also available on the Commission's website at <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/dtvantennas.html> and <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/troubleshootguide.html>, respectively. I am also attaching some FAQs with suggestions for resolving problems that viewers may encounter in receiving DTV signals.

Again, I appreciate your bringing this matter to my attention. I hope that this information has been helpful. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Julius Genachowski". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Julius Genachowski
Chairman

Enclosures