



OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

October 6, 2009

The Honorable Eric J.J. Massa  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1208 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Massa:

Thank you for your letter regarding the difficulties some of your constituents are having with the switch to digital television. I appreciate and share your concern about these problems, and want to assure you that we are continuing to work to explore remedies to help fill in coverage gaps to the extent technically feasible.

One of the more difficult aspects of the transition was to educate an entire nation in a short time frame. In developing the DTV service plan, the Commission sought to ensure that the TV station's digital coverage areas replicated their analog coverage areas as closely as possible. The Commission recognized in late 2008 that there were some consumers that may lose service based on the predicted coverage areas of stations. At that time, the Commission worked to educate the broadcasters and the public on these service loss areas through the issuance of predicted signal coverage maps and our online reception mapping tool that provides consumers with predicted signal reception based on their specific location. The Commission also put into place various tools that the industry could use over time to fill in loss areas. We have also been working directly with individual consumers to attempt to resolve their reception issues as they occur.

The ineffectiveness of the converter boxes that you describe likely is due to the signal strength of the stations and the type of antenna in use by your constituents, as opposed to a malfunction of the converter box itself. DTV reception is highly dependent on the individual locations and antenna set-ups of consumers. My legislative affairs staff contacted your office to receive more specific information on the constituents that are having reception difficulties in your district. For those constituents that provided phone numbers, our Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau staff contacted each to discuss their reception and help answer questions. For the other areas in your district where consumers are having difficulties, I requested that our engineers review the current state of digital signal coverage in your district.

The results of the examination found that the primary market serving your district is the Elmira Designated Market Area ("DMA"). There are six other DMAs – Binghamton, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, NY, Erie and Wilkes Barre-Scranton, PA – that serve the smaller fringe areas of your district. The number of receivable DTV signals varies widely throughout the district. For example, generally in Brighton, there is one strong full-power DTV signal and one weak full-power DTV signal. In Canandaigua, it appears that there are four moderate full-power

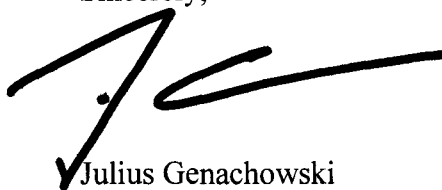
DTV signals and five weak full-power DTV signals. In Corning generally, there are four strong full-power DTV signals; and in Elmira, there is one strong full-power DTV signal and four weak full-power DTV signals. For constituents living within these areas, an outdoor antenna may be necessary for reception of the weaker DTV signals, and amplifiers or boosters may help to pull in the signals.

For constituents living in or around Hornell and Olean, reception of full-power DTV signals will be more difficult, as the towns do not appear to be within the predicted service area of any full-power DTV station. However, there are low power television stations that are still operating in analog that likely are available to consumers in those areas. Residents should try disconnecting the converter box from their antenna and TV and connect the antenna directly to the TV to see if they can receive the low power stations in analog. These consumers will need the DTV converter box in the future, when these low power TV stations make their own transition to digital within the next few years.

While I assure you that we will do all that we can to assist your constituents, please keep in mind that in some cases consumers may have been receiving analog signals from stations that were never expected to serve that location or they were living on the edge of the analog service area and received a snowy, but acceptable picture. Due to the differences between the analog and digital technologies, for these consumers, there may not be a short-term solution. Some consumers affected by this may choose to subscribe to pay television services from cable, telephone, or satellite companies. Unfortunately, as you note, there could still be some consumers who reside in the more rural areas without cable service and where local stations are not available via satellite. It may be possible that in the future either DirecTV or Dish Network will provide local signals to the Elmira DMA, as currently there is no legal impediment to the provision of local television stations to residents of the Elmira DMA.

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', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Julius Genachowski  
Chairman