

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER ROBERT M. McDOWELL**

RE: Implementation of Short-term Analog Flash and Emergency Readiness Act; Establishment of DTV Transition “Analog Nightlight” Program, MB Docket No. 08-255

I am pleased to support this effort to quickly implement the Short-term Analog Flash and Emergency Readiness (“SAFER”) Act, which will permit certain full-power television stations to continue limited analog broadcasts after the February 17, 2009, deadline for the nation’s transition to digital television (“DTV”). Congress has directed the Commission to swiftly provide a program to help those American TV households caught unprepared by the digital transition by allowing television stations technically capable of continuing to broadcast an analog signal after February 17 (that does not interfere with all the new DTV signals) to air analog messages limited to DTV education and public safety information until March 19, 2008. We all hope that these messages will significantly assist those TV viewers who rely solely on rabbit-ear or rooftop antennas with soon-to-be-outmoded analog sets to obtain television service.

“Analog nightlight” programming can – and, to my way of thinking, should – provide more than just general information about the transition. Rather, I hope to see the “nightlight” stations provide their local audiences with specific information about such matters as obtaining converter boxes, re-positioning antennas, and how they can obtain further one-on-one assistance. I look forward to working with the industry to rapidly finalize plans for phone banks that will provide viewers with helpful information in the most direct and accessible manner possible.

I also note that our initial engineering analysis indicates that many local communities may have no station eligible to provide “nightlight” service. Our analysis is a conservative one, however, which means that at least some stations in those markets may be able to find a technical way around potential interference issues. For this reason, I strongly support the Notice’s call for stations in such communities to seriously consider whether they can, in fact, address the need and submit engineering showings to make their service possible.

Finally, as I have said before, although we are striving to smooth the way for the DTV transition, it is likely to be messy for those who, by choice or circumstance, must depend on converter boxes to keep TV service in their homes. I continue to encourage everyone to join government and industry to help those most at risk of being left behind when the change comes: the elderly, the infirm, low-income individuals, and non-English speakers. People should not wait until February 17 to help themselves and their neighbors, friends, and family get ready for DTV. I particularly urge those who don’t need the government subsidy not to wait on that process before purchasing a converter box for themselves or as a gift for someone else. During the weeks it takes for the government to process coupon requests, you will lose precious time to hook up the box, check antenna connections, and start enjoying free digital broadcast TV right away.