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September 26, 2008

The Honorable Meredith A. Baker
Acting Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information
National Telecommunications and Information Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Ms. Baker:

We are now less than 6 months from the nationwide digital television (DTV) transition. Among the many challenges posed by the DTV transition is ensuring that U.S. citizens living near the Mexican border are adequately informed of and prepared for the transition. The Mexican border areas are different from most other areas of the country, both culturally and because residents of those areas are often able to receive U.S. and Mexican over-the-air television signals. After the DTV transition, most Mexican stations will continue to broadcast only in analog format, and all full-power U.S. stations will broadcast in digital format. Because many of the Spanish-speaking households near the border watch both U.S. and Mexican television, there appears to be much potential for consumer confusion.

We understand that most, if not all, of the markets in the border region have a disproportionately high percentage of households that rely on over-the-air television. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) must, therefore, take extra care to target its consumer education efforts to households in these areas. We also understand that many Spanish-speaking households in the border region can be characterized fairly as low-income, and their ability to purchase new digital televisions or to subscribe to a pay-TV service may therefore be limited. These households will require converter boxes to continue to receive the signals of U.S. stations on analog televisions after February 17, 2009.

Fortunately, most retailers are now only stocking converter boxes with the analog pass-through feature that will enable households along the Mexican border to receive both U.S. digital signals and Mexican analog signals on their analog sets. The unique situation in border communities, however, suggests that these households would benefit from targeted education

efforts concerning the availability of a Government subsidy—available only through March 2009—for a converter box.

The situation in the U.S.-Mexican border area deserves the NTIA's special attention. We should do all that we can to ensure that every consumer is informed and ready for the transition and that every household that needs to is able to take advantage of the converter box coupon program. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John D. Dingell
Chairman

Edward J. Markey
Chairman
Subcommittee on Telecommunications
and the Internet

Charles A. Gonzalez
Member
Subcommittee on Telecommunications
and the Internet

Gene Green
Member
Subcommittee on Telecommunications
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Lois Capps
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Subcommittee on Telecommunications
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Hilda L. Solis
Member
Subcommittee on Telecommunications
and the Internet

cc: The Honorable Joe Barton, Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Cliff Stearns, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet