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Commerce's NTIA Awards \$1.65 Million to Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund to Help Vulnerable Groups Transition to Digital TV

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WASHINGTON—The Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) awarded today \$1.65 million to the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund (LCCREF) to help vulnerable populations transition to digital television with the TV Converter Box Coupon Program. Coupons should be requested by the end of the year for consumers to be prepared when full-power TV broadcasters switch from analog to 100 percent digital broadcasts after February 17, 2009—88 days from today.

"We are grateful for LCCREF partnering with us to help vulnerable Americans make the transition to digital television," said Acting NTIA Administrator Meredith Baker. "Combined with the \$2.7 million awarded to the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, NTIA has now provided \$4.35 million to assist seniors, minorities, low-income individuals, the disabled and rural residents with hands-on help to complete the digital transition."

These organizations will assist hundreds of thousands of consumers to complete a coupon application, obtain a converter box and connect the device to a television in the home. Also, LCCREF will establish two Digital TV Assistance Centers in seven television markets with large over-the-air populations to train local leaders to ensure that households most at-risk have the necessary tools, resources, and technical assistance to continue accessing free over-the-air television. The television markets are Atlanta; Detroit; Minneapolis-St.Paul; Portland, Ore; San Antonio, Texas; San Francisco-San Jose-Oakland; and Seattle-Tacoma.

"The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund is pleased to be working with NTIA. We also look forward to working with our local partners on the ground to set up assistance centers and provide vulnerable communities with direct hands-on assistance," said Karen McGill Lawson, president of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund. "Access to free over-the-air television is an important lifeline for millions of Americans."

NTIA is working with more than 300 private organizations and government agencies to ensure a smooth digital TV transition for all Americans. Also, NTIA's consumer education effort, including the "apply, buy and try" campaign to urge consumers to request coupons before the end of the year, is proving effective. To date, more than 19 million households—10 million of those rely on an antenna for broadcast TV--have requested 36 million coupons, and more than 15 million coupons have been redeemed.

Background

The Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act of 2005 requires full-power television stations to cease analog broadcasts and switch to digital after February 17, 2009. The Act authorizes NTIA to create the TV Converter Box Coupon Program, which is funded by the \$19 billion airwaves auction and not tax dollars. Digital broadcast television offers consumers a clearer picture, more programming choices and will free up the airwaves for better communications among emergency first responders and new telecommunications services.

Consumers receiving free, over-the-air television on analog televisions will need to act to ensure their televisions continue to work when full power television stations go all-digital. Viewers of over-the-air television need to look at each analog set in their home that is not connected to cable, satellite or other pay television service and make a timely decision. They can connect their television to cable, satellite or pay television service; they can replace it with a digital TV; or they may keep it working with a TV converter box.

For consumers choosing the converter box option, the TV Converter Box Coupon Program permits all households to request up to two coupons - each worth \$40 - toward the purchase of certified converter boxes. Coupons may be requested until March 31, 2009, or while supplies last. Consumers can purchase a converter box at one of the more than 35,000 participating local, phone or online retailers. Coupon applications can take several weeks to process and mail so consumers opting to purchase a converter box should act now, and should call stores before shopping to ensure the desired converter box is available. Converter boxes generally cost between \$45 and \$80 and coupons expire 90 days from the date they are mailed.

Some viewers watch programs over translators or other low-power stations which may continue broadcasting analog signals after February 17, 2009. Those viewers may wish to select a converter box that will pass through analog signals.

Households may apply now for coupons online at www.DTV2009.gov, by phone at 1-888-DTV-2009 (1-888-388-2009), via fax at 1-877-DTV-4ME2 (1-877-388-4632) or by mail to P.O. Box 2000, Portland, OR 97208-2000. Deaf or hard of hearing callers may dial 1-877-530-2634 (English TTY) or 1-866-495-1161 (Spanish TTY). Nursing home residents may apply with the paper application available downloadable at www.DTV2009.gov.

Consumers will receive a list of eligible converter boxes and participating retailers with their coupons. Coupons expire 90 days after they are mailed, and only one coupon can be used to purchase each coupon-eligible converter box.

For more information about the Coupon Program, please visit www.DTV2009.gov and for questions about the DTV transition, go to www.dtv.gov or call 1-888-CALL-FCC.

NTIA is responsible for the development of the domestic and international telecommunications policy of the Executive Branch.

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