

SENATOR GORDON H. SMITH

“Preparing for the Digital Television Transition: Will Seniors Be Left in the Dark?”

Special Committee on Aging

September 19, 2007

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Today, we are about a year and a half away from one of the largest transitions in United States broadcasting history.

Already advertisements are popping up on television sets alerting consumers about the upcoming digital TV or DTV transition. “Are You Ready?” they ask viewers, encouraging them to ensure their TVs will not go dark on February 17, 2009. I have the same question for the federal government, “Are We Ready?”

In the Aging Committee we have the opportunity and responsibility to look at the digital transition with a narrow focus on our seniors – those most likely to be impacted. The transition is a massive undertaking and its success depends on significant efforts from both the public and private sectors.

I am encouraged by recent efforts in both the public and private sector to help facilitate the DTV transition. Specifically, I applaud the NTIA for their selection of a vendor to implement the converter box coupon program and the cable industry’s announcement of a \$200 million advertising campaign to inform their customers of the DTV transition.

We must ensure that the necessary steps are taken to guarantee a smooth transition without fraud or interrupted TV service for elderly households. It is imperative that seniors receive accurate information on the transition in a format that is easy to understand. I also want to ensure that the federal government provides the appropriate resources, including funding, to inform and assist our nation’s seniors on issues related to the transition. In doing so, it is imperative that all stakeholders work with the Aging Network.

The Aging Network is a comprehensive system that includes 655 area agencies on aging, 29,000 local service provider organizations and hundreds of thousands of volunteers who interact with seniors on a regular basis in communities throughout our country. Many of you are familiar with their work with various programs, including Meals on Wheels that provides meal services to homebound seniors.

The Aging Network is one of the primary resources to communicate information and offer services to the elderly community related to many government programs and issues impacting them. I anticipate the Network will be integral to the success of the DTV transition for this segment of our population. I look forward to hearing how each of the stakeholders here today plans to work with the Aging Network to ensure seniors are ready for the transition.

As part of the education campaign, we must make a concerted effort to protect seniors from potential fraud. There is no shortage of swindlers willing to capitalize on the confusion and fears that could surround the DTV transition. With seniors as their main prey, I guarantee that these bad actors are

already scheming to dupe seniors into the purchase of unneeded televisions or converter boxes. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how they will proactively work to prevent this type of fraud.

I welcome our witnesses and look forward to hearing their testimony.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.