



Office of Commissioner Robert M. McDowell  
Federal Communications Commission  
Washington, D.C. 20554

January 14, 2009

The Honorable Kevin J. Martin  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 Twelfth Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Kevin:

I write to memorialize my comments at this weekend's Consumer Electronics Show by directly letting you know of my increasing concern about the Commission's ability to handle what will be a crush of inquiries in the coming days and weeks regarding the transition to digital television broadcasting. In short, it appears that the Commission's efforts to date are inadequate. As neither I, nor either of our colleagues, have been consulted in advance or otherwise asked to assist with the tasks at hand, I cannot be certain regarding the extent of the Commission's shortcomings.

For instance, I have questions about the reports indicating that requests for quotation related to the switch to digital television, including one to outsource FCC Consumer Center operations, remain pending. I wonder whether last week's FCC News Release announcing various contract awards completes the Commission's efforts. Likewise, although I am aware of industry efforts to try to provide a more coordinated approach to call centers, it appears that your fellow commissioners have not been brought into planning discussions concerning this important initiative. Given that the transition is little over a month away, I share the questions recently expressed by other stakeholders as to the Commission's plans for awarding any outstanding contracts and educating personnel to satisfactorily resolve unique and likely technical questions.

In the meantime, there appears to be a lack of preparedness within the FCC Consumer Center (1-888-CALL-FCC). Through personal experience, I have found that busy signals are common. And, when the line actually rings, it frequently does so for more than two minutes. After what can be a lengthy period of ringing, the caller is greeted with an electronic options menu, rather than a live operator. Moreover, callers that opt for a live operator are sometimes spontaneously disconnected rather than re-routed. I also am concerned that our call center has not been staffed on recent weekends, when consumers having difficulties with newly purchased converter boxes are likely to reach out for help. Given that we have not yet reached the transition date, I am especially concerned by this apparent lack of readiness.

As you know, some have called for reconsideration and possible extension of the February 17 analog cutoff date. I believe that the Commission's outreach and call center efforts can be remedied in time, but we have an extraordinary amount of ground to cover in a short period of time. To accomplish this daunting task, the Commission must be better organized, more energetic and must coordinate its efforts in a more open and collaborative manner. American consumers deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert M. McDowell".

Robert M. McDowell

cc: The Honorable Michael J. Copps  
The Honorable Jonathan S. Adelstein