



**Congress of the United States
House of Representatives**

July 23, 2004

The Honorable Michael K. Powell, Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Powell:

As our nation enters the digital television era, we urge the Federal Communications Commission to seize this important opportunity to establish meaningful public interest obligations for America's television broadcasters.

Television plays a critical role in the democratic discourse of our country. By law, broadcasters must do their part to promote civic participation and the diversity of voices and viewpoints that enhance our democracy and culture. The public interest also requires that broadcasters air programming that serves the educational needs of children, conforms with the Americans with Disabilities Act (i.e., closed captioning, video description, digital features that would provide for more access), addresses underserved communities, and generally promotes local and community programming. Ensuring that the licensees of the public's extraordinarily valuable airwaves adequately serve the public interest appropriately balances the First Amendment interests of broadcasters and their audience, and guarantees that the coming age of digital television will benefit both broadcasters and the American public.

Local digital broadcast stations will soon be able to transmit up to six separate channels of digital programming in place of their one current analog channel. Some local stations are already broadcasting additional digital channels. In 1996, the federal government granted broadcasters a free license to use this enormously increased digital broadcasting capacity, estimated by some to be worth hundreds of billions of dollars. The transition to digital also offers broadcasters the opportunity to fulfill their existing obligation to serve the public "interest, convenience and necessity" in creative, substantive ways. For this to happen, however, broadcasters need specific guidance about what constitutes public interest broadcasting.

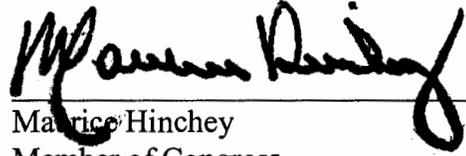
The public expects – and our democracy requires – that the Commission define meaningful public interest requirements so that this generous grant of spectrum will benefit not only broadcasters, but also our national and local communities. Further, we believe broadcasting public interest obligations must be defined by the Commission now, at this critical stage in the transition to digital broadcasting, before the Commission reaches any decision on broadcasters' demands that it compel local cable operators to carry not just one, but all their digital program channels.

We thank you in advance for your immediate attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



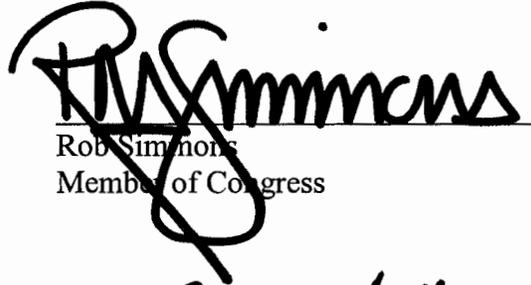
Diane E. Watson
Member of Congress



Maurice Hinchey
Member of Congress



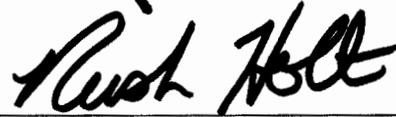
David Price
Member of Congress



Rob Simmons
Member of Congress



Donald Payne
Member of Congress



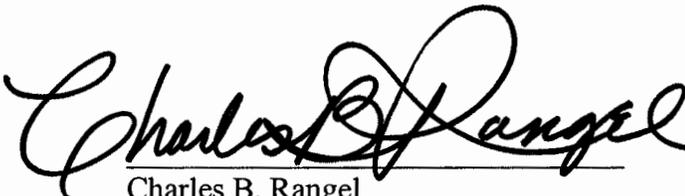
Rush Holt
Member of Congress



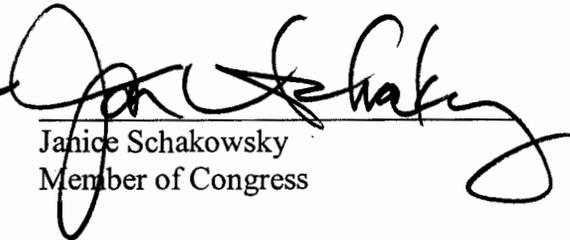
Ed Case
Member of Congress



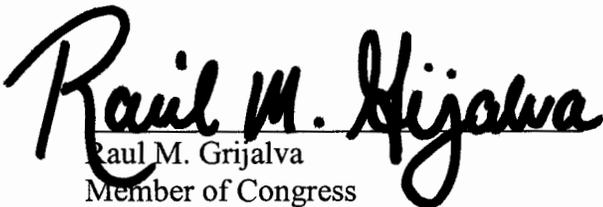
Jim McDermott
Member of Congress



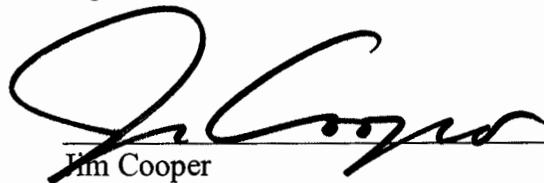
Charles B. Rangel
Member of Congress



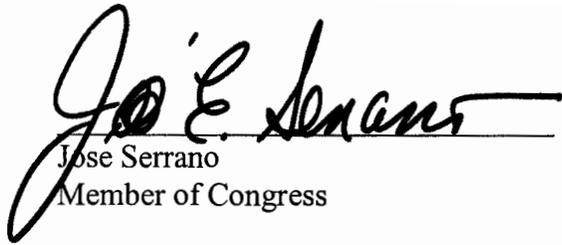
Janice Schakowsky
Member of Congress



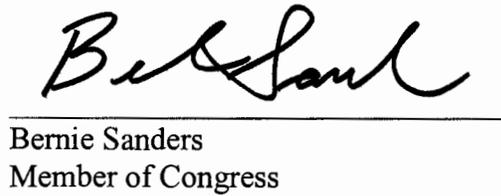
Raul M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



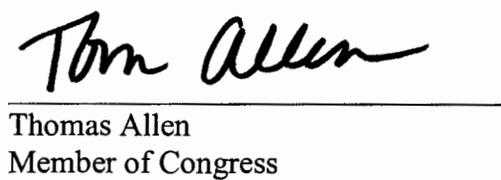
Jim Cooper
Member of Congress

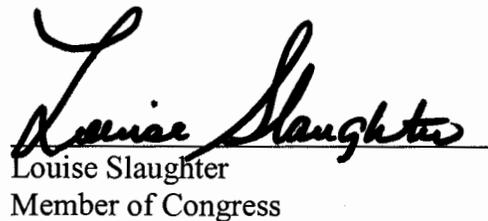

Jose Serrano
Member of Congress

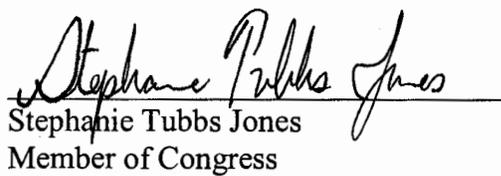

Carolyn Maloney
Member of Congress

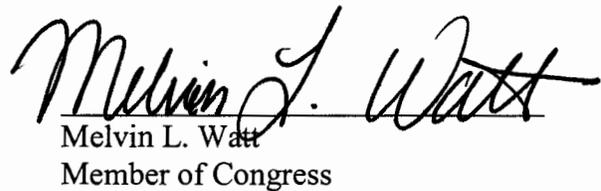

Bernie Sanders
Member of Congress


Bob Filner
Member of Congress

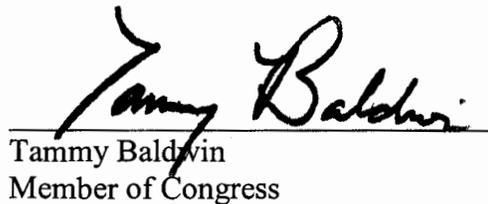

Thomas Allen
Member of Congress

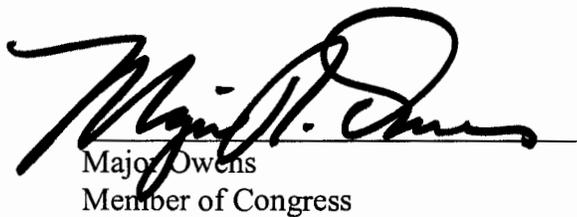

Louise Slaughter
Member of Congress


Stephanie Tubbs Jones
Member of Congress


Melvin L. Watt
Member of Congress


Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

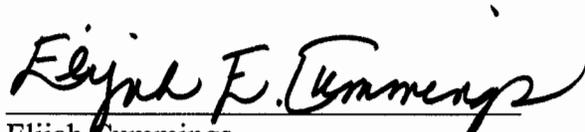

Tammy Baldwin
Member of Congress


Major Owens
Member of Congress

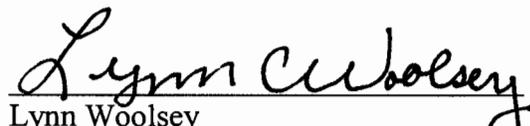

Joe Baca
Member of Congress


Max Sandlin
Member of Congress


Sam Farr
Member of Congress


Elijah Cummings
Member of Congress

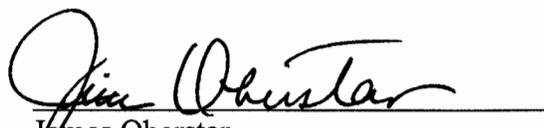

Hilda Solis
Member of Congress

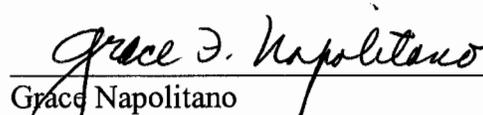

Lynn Woolsey
Member of Congress


Tom Udall
Member of Congress


Sherrod Brown
Member of Congress


Tim Ryan
Member of Congress


James Oberstar
Member of Congress


Grace Napolitano
Member of Congress


John Spratt
Member of Congress

CC: Commissioner Kathleen Q. Abernathy
Commissioner Michael J. Copps
Commissioner Kevin J. Martin
Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein