

September 10, 2010

The Right Hon. Stephen Joseph Harper, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6



Dear Prime Minister Harper:



We, the undersigned, are writing to urge the Government of Canada to launch a public education campaign about the major changes coming to the Canadian television system as a result of the transition to digital planned for August 31, 2011. We endorse the recommendation made by the CRTC earlier this year, in public policy 2010-485, for a comprehensive and co-ordinated national education campaign.

As in other countries, the digital transition will mean changes for TV viewers that need to be communicated to avoid anger and frustration. What's more, the digital TV transition is poised to end access to free, over-the-air TV signals for millions of Canadians in smaller cities, towns and rural areas. The CRTC has ruled that broadcasters are required to upgrade to digital in only 32 of the largest population centres. Over-the-air transmitters will gradually go dark in hundreds of other communities as existing analogue equipment serving those communities comes to the end of its useful life. That means thousands of Canadian households will suddenly lose their TV signals and may have to buy cable or satellite to watch any TV at all. They will lose the choice that Canadians in major cities will continue to have to watch TV for free over the air. This represents a particular hardship for low-income people.



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We believe a communications campaign on this issue should provide information to individual Canadians and communities on the changes and their options; for example, cost-effective alternatives that communities could implement to maintain their access to over-the-air television, including innovative opportunities presented by the digital switchover. A few examples include:

- Community rebroadcasting of remote services using digital multiplexes
- Free-to-air community channels
- Local emergency info, weather and news headlines over wireless phone services
- Free wireless Internet, as has been implemented throughout US public schools



The fact that the digital transition has been mandated in large Canadian urban centres only, and may not occur at all outside these centres, underscores the fact that rural communities need to know their options if they are to take full and equal advantage of the potential of digital technologies. Surely the point of "going digital" is to open up new possibilities, not shut them down—and this enormous potential needs to be publicized.



A number of signatories below have expertise in these areas and would be pleased to offer our services in an information campaign aimed at Canadians and their communities.



Given that the transition is already well advanced and the analog cut-off date is less than a year away, the need to provide information to Canadians and their communities is urgent. We hope to hear from you at the latest by the end of September.

Sincerely,



Canadian Association for Community Television Users and Stations (CACTUS)
Canadian Association of Media Education Organizations (CAMEO)
Canadian Conference for the Arts
Canadian Labour Congress
Canadian Media Guild
Centre for Community Study
Community Media Education Society
Council for Canadians
CWA/SCA Canada
Documentary Organization of Canada
Friends of Canadian Broadcasting
Independent Media Arts Alliance (IMAA/AAMI)
Media Access Canada
OpenMedia
Public Interest Advocacy Centre
rabble.ca
Smart Change
Telecommunautés Canada
Charlie Angus, **NDP Heritage Critic**
Carole Lavallée, **Bloc Heritage Critic**
Kirsten Kozolanka, Associate Professor, **Carleton University**
Roberta G. (Becky) Lentz, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Art History and Communication Studies, **McGill University**

Dr. Catherine Middleton, Canada Research Chair, Communication Technologies in the Information Society, **Ryerson University**
Marita Moll, Lecturer, Technology, Society and Environment, **Carleton University**
Leslie Regan Shade, Associate Professor, Department of Communication Studies, **Concordia University**
Dr. Wade Rowland, Assistant Professor, Department of Communication Studies, **York University**
Philip Savage, Associate Professor, Department of Communication Studies and Multimedia, **McMaster University**
Gregory Taylor, **Ryerson University**
Darren Alexander, Toronto
Heather Anderson, concerned Canadian
Nicole Blanchett Neheli, Oakville
Sandy Crawley, Toronto
Nick Fillmore, Toronto
Blair Fix
Avi Lambert
Stephen James May, author, Dude, where's my TV? blog
Fenwick Mckelvey



CC. The Honourable James Moore, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages
The Honourable Tony Clement, Minister of Industry
Konrad von Finckenstein, Chair, Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission

