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**Television's Switch From Analog To Digital:
Nothing's Free Anymore
Between The Lines**

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Last week, the federal government moved forth with allowing public airwaves to be transitioned from the analog transmission to the newer, advanced digital forms of communication transmission. Now understand, we all must realize that everything must change. NOTHING remains the same. The advancement of technology has changed everything about television, making them larger, thinner and more crystal clear. The only thing that hadn't changed was how the transmission of television was received.

The government told everyone that the change was coming. This was bigger than the cry, "The British are coming, The British are coming." It was bigger than crying "wolf" or the floods or the tornadoes and other forms of natural or manmade disasters. The government warned that if you didn't go out to buy a digital transmission receiver box, you would be without television. For real? Like all warnings, many choose not to comply. For good reason this time; one, we're in a national depression, two-we're in the midst of two wars, three-supply of transmission boxes was a concern.

President Bush was ready to press this transition from analog to digital at the beginning of the year. Then President-elect Obama asked for a delay to get the nation better educated and better prepared for (what they called) "the switch." Yet, when "t-day" (transmission day) hit June 12th, much of America was no more better educated or ready for this switch. Millions of people were caught looking at a blank screen on "t-day" because they didn't buy the box and no remedy if they had no money. So, the last free thing that we can all access, television, is no longer free.

Television is the GREAT socializer of our society. Americans are television "junkies." In 1960, only two-thirds of the nation had one television in their home. Less than five percent of the nation had a second television in their home. Forty years later, by the turn of the century, Ninety-eight percent of American homes had a television in the home. Seventy percent of American homes have a second television. Half the nation's

homes have three or more “televisions” in their home. Even people who claim they don’t watch television, have multiple televisions in their homes. We now have televisions in our cars and on our wrists and in our i-pods. Television is the maker and fashioner of our popular culture. It is our national alert system in time of emergency and call for immediate action as it is the nation’s primary form of communication (as radio once was). It is the most common tie between the people and the government. Television serves as the public’s leading source for information, entertainment and even serves as our mate in the late night as one in six Americans fell asleep by the television (one in eight leave it on all night).

Television is many a person’s one and only friend. It is the country’s last threat between the rich and the poor, and the privileged and the underprivileged, the powerful and the weak. In fact, when the powerful want to reach the weak, they use television to reach out. It is our baby-sitter, as poor people use television to entertain and pacify themselves and their children. And, of course, television is economic enough to consume as much as one wants, for as long as one want, because it is free. Or it was free.

Now, here’s some questions that address the political and economic realities of this switch; One, did anyone bother to explain to the American people why the “switch” was necessary? Two, was it necessary or was it optional? If it was necessary, why did not the government GIVE the transmission boxes to the American people? Who made the boxes? Who got the contract to make a BILLION boxes for the over one billion televisions in the United States (easy if half of the nation’s 200 million households have three or more televisions)? How much were those contracts? Why did the government subsidize (give discount coupons) to only a limited number of residents? What will happen to the millions of people who cannot afford the transmission boxes (even with the coupon)? What is the real benefit here, or was this one last economic benefit for the exiting Bush capitalists?

The timing was real strange, and the sense of urgency seemed more pretentious than real. Do the boxes have a lifetime guarantee, or do the American people now have to buy these boxes every three to five years, or more troubling buy free channels from their cable companies? And what if you don’t have or can’t afford cable? Then you have no choice but to buy the box. And t.v. is no longer free. Now we don’t only have to worry about what’s on the television, but whether we can get television at all.

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What’s next? Paying for radio? Probably. One thing we know for sure, nothing is free anymore. Not even television.

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