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Thanks to geniuses in Congress, your TV may no longer work

By *srlinuxx*
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ONE DAY in the not-too-distant future, all the TV sets in your home that aren't hooked to cable boxes will turn into pumpkins. If you want to receive over-the-air broadcasts, you'll have to replace them with sets that cost at least twice as much, or pay a $100 "digital TV tax" for each set. That's what I call the estimated cost of a converter that will enable your set to do what it did for free the day before - receive TV broadcasts.

You can thank Congress for this opportunity. Back in 1996, our lawmakers, the nation's broadcasters, the Federal Communications Commission and the folks who make consumer electronics hatched a scheme that will cost households hundreds, if not thousands of dollars each for something they have demonstrated only a marginal appetite for so far - high definition digital television (HDTV).

Collectively, the cost will run to billions, most of which will go into driving up a trade deficit that's already past 100 percent on the scary meter. And as usual, the burden will fall heaviest on those who can afford it least.

Every now and then, the Federal Communications Commission does something more to remind me just how stupid this deal really is. Last week, it voted to speed up the pace at which TV manufacturers will have to make sets with digital tuners available to the public. Not that manufacturers have paid much attention to past deadlines.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Here's how the scheme works:

Full Story [2].

Sci/Tech

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