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Updates on the News

Senate green lights Capps, Tate – The nominations of Michael Capps and Deborah Taylor Tate to the Commission have been confirmed by the Senate. Capps will now remain in the saddle until June 30, 2010. Tate, who is filling the seat formerly held by Chairman Powell, is on a shorter leash – her term will expire on June 30, 2007.

New entry in DTV Conversion Dead(line) Pool – It looks like the deadline for the final DTV conversion is on the move again. When last we reported on this (in October, 2005), the smart money – by which we mean Senate Commerce Committee – was showing April 7, 2009 as the odds-on favorite. That was a dark horse in the race. Originally, it looked like December 31, 2008 was the leading contender when the House put all its chips there. But look out, coming up on the outside is February 17, 2009. The House/Senate Conference Committee picked that compromise date earlier this month. Since 2/17/09 was agreed to by both the House and Senate, it's likely to be the final date – unless, of course, something else comes up in the next three years to change it. We wouldn't be betting the farm yet.

While it was deciding on a new deadline, the Conference Committee also got into the gift-giving spirit by approving the distribution of the proceeds of spectrum auctions. Among the bigger ticket items: a downconverter subsidy of about \$1.5 billion, which will be used to help consumers afford the cost of DTV converters when the switch-over happens; \$75 million for a program to help LPTV and TV translators make the digital transition; and \$30 million for an alliance of NYC stations to acquire additional digital gear necessary to allow them to deliver an “adequate” digital signal from the Empire State Building.