

**Remarks of
Chairman Kevin J. Martin**

**Second Meeting of the FCC's Independent Panel Reviewing the Impact of
Hurricane Katrina on Communications Networks**

**Jackson, Mississippi
March 6, 2006**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Welcome to the second meeting of the FCC's Independent Panel Reviewing the Impact of Hurricane Katrina on Communications Networks. I am particularly pleased that we are able to hold this meeting here in Jackson.

I would like to thank the Mississippi e-Center at Jackson State University for providing the facilities for this meeting. And thank you to Congressman Chip Pickering for his continuing support of the Commission's work in response to the Hurricanes.

I would also like to thank the individuals who have volunteered to present at this meeting for their commitment to helping this Panel in its critical undertaking.

This is a unique endeavor. The Independent Panel brings together experts from all sectors of the communications industry and experts from public safety organizations.

Together, you will study the impact of Hurricane Katrina on communications. The Panel will review the sufficiency and effectiveness of the recovery effort with respect to the infrastructure; and make recommendations to the Commission on ways to improve disaster preparedness, network reliability and resilience, and communications among emergency responders.

This meeting is especially important because it is taking place here in Mississippi. Here today we have many facets of the communications industry, the public safety sector and public interest organizations, many of whom were directly affected by Katrina or were involved in recovery and response efforts.

Some of the people we will be hearing from include EMS personnel, telecommunications equipment providers, radio broadcasters and representatives from disability organizations. They will offer their ideas on how best to address the challenges communications services faced during Hurricane Katrina and how to be better prepared in the future.

I certainly don't need to tell you, that Katrina caused extraordinary destruction to facilities in the region and disrupted the communications services upon which citizens rely. Nearly three million telephone lines were knocked down in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Significant damage was inflicted both on the wireline switching centers that route calls and on the lines used to connect buildings and customers to the network.

Thirty-eight 9-1-1 call centers went down. Local wireless networks also sustained considerable damage with more than one thousand cell sites out of service. Over 20 million telephone calls did not go through the day after the hurricane hit. An estimated 100 broadcast stations were knocked off the air.

As a result, hundreds of thousands of people were unable to receive news and emergency information, contact emergency responders, or communicate with their loved ones. Additionally, emergency workers and public safety officials had difficulty communicating and coordinating with one another. At times like these, we are reminded of the importance of our communications system, which most of us ordinarily take for granted.

I am proud of the Commission's efforts to respond to Hurricane Katrina. Hundreds of Commission employees were involved in these efforts working 24 hours a day and seven days a week. The Commission devoted significant time and resources to enable first responders to communicate and to facilitate companies' ability to restore services in the region. We provided millions of dollars for immediate support. For all people eligible for FEMA disaster assistance, we provided wireless handsets and a package of 300 free minutes. These funds also helped those who had been cut off reestablish their lines of communication and supported the telecommunications needs of the region's schools and health care providers, including American Red Cross shelters.

The FCC's commitment to responding to Katrina is as strong today as it was when I first visited the region days after the storm. Last week, the Commission extended its relief plan to assist the victims of the hurricane. This action enables cellular companies to continue to make available wireless services to victims of the hurricane. Schools and libraries directly affected by Katrina may now apply for 2006 funding for services through September 30th.

While the Commission continues to provide assistance to consumers and businesses affected by Katrina, we are also taking the time to learn from that tragedy. I have several suggestions to improve our ability to serve the public in the event of another disaster.

First, we must ensure that the public has the tools necessary to be alerted when an emergency is coming and to contact first responders. Such an efficient and effective alert must include the internet. And to ensure people can get emergency assistance, all phone providers must comply with our 9-1-1 rules. The Commission has made it clear that the obligation to provide access to emergency operators should not be optional - - regardless of whether the telephone provider is wireless, wireline, cable or VoIP. Also, to improve the public's access to emergency assistance, we must help local jurisdictions cooperate with one another making their 9-1-1 call centers more redundant and resilient.

Secondly, we should enable first responders to communicate seamlessly during a disaster. New technologies such as "smart radios" and mobile antennas can be used to re-establish communication as quickly as possible. First responders must also have equipment that can communicate on multiple frequencies and in multiple formats so police, firefighters and EMS personnel at the local, state and federal levels can all talk to one other.

Finally, we should ensure that all communications providers develop and adhere to best practices to ensure reliability and quick restoration of services in the event of a disaster. Best practices should include, among other things, maintaining service during extended commercial power outages using back-up generators and equipment.

I would also like to see a greater use of IP technologies that are capable of changing and rerouting telecommunications traffic. In the event of a systems failure within the traditional network, such IP technologies would enable service to be restored more quickly and would provide the flexibility to initiate service at new locations chosen by consumers.

It is the task of this Independent Panel however, to fully assess what worked and what didn't work during Hurricane Katrina. In June it will recommend steps the Commission should take in order to make our communications networks more robust in the future. By participating here today, you are greatly assisting the work of this panel and the FCC in this regard.

Thank you for all of your efforts.

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