

Transcript of Closing Remarks of Michael K. Powell  
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission  
FCC Telecommunications Services Priority Summit  
Washington D.C.  
Thursday, February 17, 2005

I think this summit is important simply because the issue of telecommunications service priorities (TSPs) is essential to this country's concerted and successful emergency response infrastructure.

In the eight years I have served on the Commission, I have seen our responsibilities become more critically engaged in emergency response in the communications sector.

The first way that I was drawn into this issue is when President Clinton asked me to head up Y2K transformation for the communications sector, a daunting challenge that we were largely able to meet. While our project was a success and disaster was averted, the process imprinted on us a deep understanding of how crucial it was to begin a much more focused and concerted undertaking to bring our response systems, our Rolodexes, our networks, our protocols and our systems up to date in order to respond to that kind of threat to critical infrastructure.

If that was not bad enough, the events of 9/11 underscored the need to create a unified communications sector capable of coping with emergency response. I went to New York three or four days later and saw the impact. We worked extensively with wireless carriers and Verizon in the enormous task of restoring networks and working with public safety officials and emergency response officials who were trying to manage the communications challenges they had on the ground.

Ever since, the Commission has set out on a path to try to integrate deeply, even into our policy proceedings, the importance of public safety response and the importance of homeland security. We have also worked to bring key stakeholders together and to try to empower further the tools that are necessary to be successful. TSP is unequivocally one of those services. But clearly, as we have heard today, we are not there yet. In an area like homeland security, we should never be satisfied. I don't think 80 per cent is good enough; I don't think 90 per cent is good enough, and I don't think until we've reached the finish line anyone should rest. This forum is critical for that purpose.

I want to commend the Department of Homeland Security for their efforts to fund and equip public safety for this capability.

I would like to conclude with two points:

First and foremost, there is no doubt that TSP can be an extraordinary tool for emergency communications among key officials and can do a great deal to minimize disruptions in communications from key players at key moments in time. I was first exposed to it in Y2K, I have used it, I have been a part of it, and I can speak from personal experience that it is something that we really want to achieve.

Secondly, we have heard that TSP is not sufficiently deployed to our satisfaction, and that there are many groups that are not in the system that should be in the system. We must dedicate ourselves to getting the widest distribution and use as possible. If we do not reach the 100 per cent level, our mission will not be complete.

I am glad that you have come together. I want to commend the people who played a central role in today's forum: Commissioner Connie Hughes, a great friend and colleague, and other members of the panel. I really appreciate the efforts of Ed Thomas, Chief of our Office of Engineering and Technology, Ken Moran of OET, and all of our experts from the public safety and the national security community. You have all provided a great service to the Commission and to America and I thank you for it.

This is not the end, of course; it is just the beginning. The Commission is here to lend its support.

Thank you for letting me conclude this important conference for you.

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