REMARKS OF
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PANEL REVIEWING THE IMPACT OF HURRICANE KATRINA ON
COMMUNICATIONS NETWORKS
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This is one meeting I really wanted to attend, but I am unable to be with you this morning because of a commitment made last year to represent the FCC at a multilateral conference. I wanted to be in Washington to welcome you, to thank you, and to talk about where you're headed.

So, first of all, welcome. We're pleased you're here. Thank you for agreeing to serve and for committing what will no doubt be serious time and energy to this important effort. As many of you have heard me say, nothing trumps public safety and homeland security. We need to be ready for the next cataclysm, whether its origin be unbridled nature or murderous terrorists, and I think most of us agree we have a lot of work still to do.

Restoring the Gulf Coast communications network—all those links torn asunder by the wind and water of Hurricane Katrina—is as challenging a communication mission as this nation has ever confronted. I commend Chairman Martin and so many of our FCC staff for their tireless efforts to aid recovery in the storm's immediate aftermath. I also salute the companies for the work they did. In the days following the storm, companies that usually compete with one another worked together in a spirit of mutual help. Inter-modal competition gave way to inter-modal cooperation and it served the public interest. Now everyone on this panel is charged with working together to serve the public interest.

That demands a thorough look, perhaps some very difficult calls, digging out the facts and making them known, and letting the chips fall where they may. You must determine as a group what actions are necessary—both short-term and long-term—to upgrade network reliability, build in systems redundancy, and enhance the survivability of our nation's communications systems. What you develop here will be tremendously relevant when we are face-to-face with more ravages of nature or with additional terrorist attacks. Concrete actions to fix our communications systems have been a long time coming—too long. We saw the results of communications failures on 9/11, over four years ago. We saw them again during the East Coast black-out, and then more recently with the hurricanes. This time, we dare not fail in our emergency planning efforts.

So we're looking to you. At their best, advisory panels like this one dig with an open mind into tough issues, identify and face up to the mistakes or shortfalls that are discovered, and make real-world—and sometimes very tough—recommendations to address them.

I expect that when you are through, we will understand, at a minimum (1) which parts of the wireline and wireless networks failed during the emergency, how long they

were down, how many people were affected, and any ripple effects these failures had; (2) whether fail-safe and backup systems worked, where and for how long, where they didn't work and why not, and what alternative technologies or systems could contribute in a future emergency; (3) the state of police, fire, 911, and healthcare communications systems readiness throughout the emergency, what worked and what didn't; and (4) the problems various federal, state, and local responder systems had talking to each other and what specific actions must be undertaken to help these first responders develop the interoperable networks they need. No doubt many other questions need to be asked as you work toward the recommendations you have been asked to produce.

The crux of my message this morning is this: don't shy away from asking the tough questions and hunting down the difficult and perhaps unsettling answers. This cannot be a superficial examination. Go wherever the facts lead. If you ruffle feathers, so be it. You may also be the target of heavy lobbying. Resist any pressures to sweep issues under the carpet. When lives are on the line, it is your job on this panel to be tough and diligent to get the answers and make the hard calls. Your panel's work will not only help the Commission and help industry; it can assist Congress and help our sister federal agencies, state and local governments, first responders, and the entire public safety, law enforcement and healthcare provider communities.

Two final thoughts. Do what you are going to do in an open public process. A closed process can only detract from the credibility that needs to attend your effort. Second, recognize there is a broad range of voices out there that are not represented on this panel—for example, Americans with disabilities. I urge you to reach out to them and to all those who are not sitting at your table this morning but whose viewpoints are important for your review and critical to their future. There are a lot of stakeholders in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast whose lives were permanently and profoundly transformed by Katrina and the other storms. They not only deserve to be heard, they *need* to be heard, and the extent to which they are heard is surely going to be one touchstone by which your fellow citizens judge the success of your endeavor. You need to be reaching out.

Again, thank you for taking on this tough assignment. You have an incredible amount of work to do in a very short time, and I expect you are anxious to begin. So I'll conclude with my best wishes as you begin your work, and I want each of you to know that, in addition to our Bureau staff, my office and I stand ready to assist you howsoever we can. Thank you all.