

## **Remarks to the American Public Communications Council**

*Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate*

*May 25, 2006*

*(Video Tape)*

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I'm sorry that I am not able to be there in person, but I am glad that I can participate in your conference even if at a distance. I want to thank Randy Nichols for organizing this event and for working so hard as president of the American Public Communications Council to represent the payphone industry.

In a world where it seems like almost everyone has a cellphone – and indeed, where 6% of households ONLY use cellphones – it's easy to forget that payphones are still an important part of many people's lives. 8.7 million American households still have no phone service at all. A payphone may be some peoples' only lifeline to communicate with others.

In particular, payphones are a critical part of homeland security. They are there for those times that we can't anticipate, when our landlines and our cellphones aren't available, and so as we plan for the possibility of another disaster – whether a terrorist attack, a hurricane, or pandemic flu – we should not forget to consider payphones as part of our response.

On that note, I want to take a minute to emphasize something that Chairman Martin has recognized since coming to the FCC and that is the vital role of the FCC in homeland security. Hurricane Katrina was just another reminder that we live in an unpredictable world. Our ability to respond quickly and efficiently to a crisis depends on our ability to communicate with one another. In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the FCC worked round-the-clock to make sure that communications providers had the ability to get telephones and radios working again. It was a tremendous effort, and the Chairman has since committed to

creating an entirely new Homeland Security bureau at the FCC devoted to these issues.

I fully support Chairman Martin's efforts in this regard. The faster you can get your phone lines back in action, the faster people can call for help or get in touch with their loved ones. The FCC needs to be prepared to act quickly to give you the freedom you need to restore services in hard-hit areas. Chairman Martin has put together an independent panel to review the Katrina response and recommend ways to build upon and improve the FCC's response to such disasters.

I also believe that the FCC needs to be prepared for the possibility of a flu pandemic. The Department of Health and Human Services has predicted that the federal government and private businesses could expect to have as much as 40% of their workforce out of work in the event of a flu pandemic. Schools would be closed, hospitals would be overwhelmed, and people would be asked to

work from home. The ability to work from home is going to depend on the ability to of our communications networks to handle the increased load. The FCC needs to be thinking about how to help meet that increased demand, and I will be working with my fellow Commissioners to see that telecommunications providers of all kinds have the resources to respond in the event of such a crisis.

Payphones are also an important part of our efforts to provide universal service. As Chairman of the Joint-Board, I will be deeply involved in discussions of the issues surrounding the Universal Service Fund. As we look at the important issues facing us, such as comprehensive reform of the Universal Service Fund and its administration -- from who contributes and how, to how the fund is disbursed -- we need to take into account the existence of, and the need for, broadband services. I know that many of you are concerned about changes to the fund that might increase your operating costs. I also know many of you are also worried about the increasing demand on the Fund and its sustainability.

I hope each of you will help us to consider these issues from the most important perspective of all – the perspective of consumers – whether Americans who pay into the Fund or Americans who benefit, often unknowingly, from the Fund. The ultimate solution isn't necessarily the one that benefits any one company or group of providers the most, but one that achieves a balancing of interests, and the most efficient and effective use of the Fund. We must keep in mind that the Universal Service Fund is not yours, or ours, but is money that has been entrusted to us to use wisely in furthering a public interest Congress has identified. We shouldn't see reform, or change, as a threat to the status quo, but as an incentive to work together to tap the potential of our collective resources to provide access to communication services and solutions for all Americans.

Once again, I want to thank you for the opportunity to send a few thoughts to you as you begin your conference. I'm sorry I couldn't

be there in person because I find all the various conferences and conventions and trade shows that I attend to be very uplifting, in a way. These events are always about thinking about the future of this industry and the future of our country and making people's lives better through technology. It's a great privilege to serve as an FCC Commissioner and be a part of this process of looking toward the future.

Thank you.