

## **Remarks to the Tennessee Wireless Association**

*Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate*

*September 14, 2006*

*Nashville, Tennessee*

Thank you, Mr. Kauffman, for that kind introduction. And thank you, Mr. Hunter, who is a commuter like me. Thank you to the Tennessee Wireless Association for this opportunity to speak to you today. First of all, I want to say how pleased I am that all five FCC Commissioners are working together and achieving consensus on many important issues that affect the daily lives of every American. The views I express today, however, are mine alone and do not necessarily represent those of the Chairman or my fellow Commissioners.

Coming from Tennessee, I have gained a real appreciation for the important services that wireless carriers provide especially in rural areas. A few months ago, I toured a top-rated call center – T-Mobile’s center right here in Nashville – and urge all of you to continue your commitment to excellent customer service. When I went to Washington, D.C., articles parented me as pro-consumer; most of you all know I’ve always been a de-regulatory regulator – I call it regulatory humility, encouraging market-based and industry solutions.

The FCC has provided me with an opportunity I never dreamed of: meeting with foreign ministers in China; joining Senator Frist for a bill signing; travels to Alaska; to working on real world issues such as E-rate and hosting a press conference in a few days to engage the media in how we can help stop the epidemic of childhood obesity.

I will say that Tennessee wireless providers and Tennessee consumers are in good hands in Washington, D.C. It’s a real privilege to see our congressional delegation in action. Several of our Congressmen and women are working on important telecommunication matters, including Congresswoman Blackburn and Congressman Gordon (both on the House Commerce Committee). And it seems like hardly a week goes by when I am not discussing an issue with Senator Frist’s or Senator Alexander’s office, whether it’s public safety or the privacy of consumer information.

Since I began serving on the Commission, I also have had the opportunity to work closely with CTIA and its President, Steve Largent, on a number of issues from wireless broadband, to parental controls for children’s television, and, currently, CMRS carriers’ ability to provide alerts to our citizens in times of crises.

Wireless providers, like everyone else, are experiencing the same rapid changes in how they do business. I'll bet that when many of you entered the business of providing cellular service, you never imagined that a cell phone might also be a camera and an Internet browser. We take all of that for granted now; meanwhile our cell phones are becoming even more versatile. For instance, several companies have recently partnered with cellular carriers to provide news, sports, and entertainment television clips to your cell phone. Others have announced special phone services for kids so that parents can track their child's location. And that's just the beginning. NTT DoCoMo, a major wireless provider in Japan, sells a smart phone that does everything from opening your garage door to paying for groceries without even taking your credit card out of your wallet. With new innovation, however, comes new responsibility, and I hope that the FCC can be a resource to help you navigate the regulatory issues that will arise as wireless carriers like you start to offer more services.

Personally, I see my place at the FCC as consisting of four roles:

- 1) I have to consider and vote on agenda items as a Commissioner.
- 2) I did not stop being a consumer of the technologies the FCC regulates when I was confirmed by the Senate. I intend to be a champion for consumers – and especially parents – by advocating for regulations that consider their needs.
- 3) I can use the “bully pulpit” of the FCC as a chance to help consumers become aware of and use the truly amazing technology that is available to help us improve our lives.
- 4) Finally, I can be a facilitator and help bring government, industry, and consumers together to work out consensus solutions to issues that take into account everyone's interests.

It is in that last role that I find my experiences at the Tennessee Regulatory Authority (“TRA”) to be particularly helpful in the job of FCC Commissioner. On a personal note, while at the TRA, I thought we had an excellent working relationship. Even though we may have had differences regarding issues, Dan Elrod, the Association, and the individual companies were always ready and willing to try and resolve those issues in a reasonable manner. I often tell the story in Washington, D.C. that even though there is little state statutory authority over CMRS providers, we met regularly, especially regarding complaints that the TRA received, because resolving those complaints was just plain good business.

As an FCC Commissioner, I encourage you to innovate and create the next great new product. In particular, I hope you continue to play a role in the deployment of broadband to more consumers. Wireless providers will be critical to getting broadband out to that last, most difficult mile. To that end, I believe that

the FCC must use a light regulatory touch that gives you the freedom to try new ideas and deploy new technologies. The FCC should be concerned with ensuring fair competition and allowing the market to work effectively.

I also want to take a moment to address universal service. As Federal Chair of the Joint-Board on Universal Service, I will be deeply involved in discussions of the issues surrounding the Universal Service Fund. I hope each of you as an individual, and all of you as an association, will help us to consider these issues from the most important perspective of all – the perspective of consumers – both those who pay into the Fund and those 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 does not belong exclusively to a particular person, group, or entity. Instead, it is money that has been entrusted to us to use wisely in furthering a public interest that 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.

Next, I would like to touch on the security of our homeland. In the past few days, Americans have remembered the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina and the atrocities of 9-11. My colleagues and I are keenly aware of how important all communications technologies are when public safety or homeland security concerns become paramount. These anniversaries remind us of the importance of homeland security and the potentially critical role of emergency alerts in times of crises. Already, I have met with several wireless carriers and industry groups regarding this matter.

And I am pleased to report that just this week – on Tuesday, September 12<sup>th</sup> – the U.S. Senate approved the Warning, Alerts and Response Network (WARN) Act by a vote of 95-0 as an amendment to the Port Security Bill that was debated this week. The amendment, sponsored by U.S. Senator Jim DeMint (R-S.C.), will create a national alert system to provide Americans with emergency information sent directly to their cell phones and other wireless devices. I commend Senator DeMint for his leadership on this very important issue. We need your help in identifying short term solutions as well as developing long term applications to provide alerts to all our citizens whether it is a natural disaster, attack on our homeland, and even the possibility of a pandemic, other health-related, or environmental attack.

On a final note, September is “National Preparedness Month,” so let me do a quick commercial message just to encourage you to discuss a family plan with

your families and with your co-workers. There are a number of suggestions on our website and I look forward to our continued work toward innovative solutions to allow more time for all of us to prepare in any type of emergency.

I appreciate the opportunity to send this message to you today. I hope that you enjoy your luncheon. Again, I hope to continue working with you all while I am here at the FCC.

Thank you.