

Remarks of Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate

Summit on Pandemic Preparedness September 18, 2008

Thank you, Chief Poarch and the entire Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau for hosting this important summit on pandemic preparedness. And thank you to all the FCC staff who work every day to ensure continuous, reliable communications capability in our great nation, especially after disasters like pandemics or – to take an example that is still demanding our attention – hurricanes. I know many of the staff have been working long hours to respond to Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, and let me add my personal appreciation to each of you. When I first arrived at the Commission we were launching our Katrina panel and I visited the Gulf Coast region, and one of my first speeches was to enjoin all of us not merely to limit our discussions to the tragedies we had experienced but also to those such as a pandemic or even other tragedies we had yet to envision, much less experience.

As compared to hurricanes, pandemics pose unique communications challenges. Instead of fleeing from a city with severely damaged communications capabilities, in a pandemic our citizens may be sheltering at

home, trying to stay in touch with their friends and family and even working – with the possibility that half the workforce will be working remotely – this will place significant demands on an undamaged but nonetheless overburdened communications network. How we plan for and respond to such an emergency requires creative thinking by government and industry health and network engineers, which is why I'm pleased to see so many experts here from such a cross-section of genres.

I am especially pleased to see we have a representative from Oak Ridge National Laboratory in my home state of Tennessee. Oak Ridge is one of our nation's premiere research facilities, with expertise in mapping collaborative data points critical to our planning for emergencies. I also want to recognize Deputy Chief Charles Dowd of the NYPD, who yesterday testified before the House Homeland Security Committee on the 700 MHz D Block – which is critical to facilitating public safety communications – and today is working with us on pandemic preparedness. We need to know what works best to ensure we get the policy right – from those on the ground, and build from the ground up – whether on the 700 MHz D Block or on the issue of pandemic preparedness, to benefit local public safety as well as our

citizens in their communities with the unique issues and resources in those communities.

In addition, to the American Red Cross, Federal and State officials, and those of you representing service providers both large and small – to all of you – thank you for your participation in today’s summit. I pray we will never need to deploy in response to another tragedy, but being prepared is our first and best defense.

May God bless you all, and May God bless the United States of America.