

**Prepared Welcoming Remarks of FCC Commissioner
Mignon L. Clyburn**

**NENA's "9-1-1 Comes to Washington Conference"
Washington, DC
March 29, 2011**

Introduction

Thank you, Brian, for that kind introduction. I am very pleased to be here this morning.

One of the top priorities for any government -- federal, State, or local -- should be to ensure the safety of our citizens. To me, this is more than just a slogan to be uttered at a public safety conference for I come from a state situated right in the middle of Hurricane Alley. We think about the possibility of facing major disasters between June and November of every year.

I'm sure there are some here who know what I mean. In fact, I understand that Renee Hardwick, Tommy Sullivan, and Kirk Stropes, from the South Carolina NENA Chapter may be here this morning. South Carolina supports this event every year and I am proud of that.

I am also certain that there are others here who share those concerns. The fact that you have expended considerable resources to participate in this conference demonstrates how important public safety is to you and your state or local government.

Now I'm not a gambler, but I'd be willing to bet that if we conducted a survey, the vast majority of Americans would say that public safety should be a top priority. I would also bet most would say that a sound communications infrastructure is vital for every government to ensure public safety. From the citizen who uses her mobile phone to reach a 9-1-1 operator in an emergency, to the rescue squads who rely upon internal communications to reaching her and providing her help. I believe most Americans would say all relevant stakeholders must work together and do all they can to provide citizens with more ways to communicate when they are in trouble.

NENA's Proud History

NENA understands the importance of collaboration in improving emergency communications. Your membership is comprised of service providers, emergency equipment vendors, as well as officials from Public Safety Answering Points, or PSAPs. Collaboration is not just a part of NENA's policy strategy. Collaboration is part of your organizational DNA.

For nearly thirty years, NENA has been a vital part of 9-1-1 services. There have been numerous occasions in which you have shown tremendous leadership in helping the FCC effectively and efficiently improve emergency communications. One example was the proceeding last year, which resulted in the Commission adopting E-9-1-1 location accuracy standards. NENA's collaboration with APCO, AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, and Verizon Wireless, made it possible for the Commission to avert a lengthy fight at the Court of Appeals, and reach a compromise on standards that would improve emergency communications. That Order sent an important message, about the direction our communications industry should take, with regard to improving E-9-1-1 services. It confirmed that collaboration among all stakeholders is a more effective path than litigation.

The NG9-1-1 Challenge

NENA's leadership will be vital in the implementation of the New and Emerging Technologies 9-1-1 Improvement Act of 2008. The goal of this federal statute is straightforward. We should migrate our current 9-1-1 networks to a national IP-enabled emergency network that can receive and respond to all citizen-activated emergency communications. This is a goal I wholeheartedly support.

Over the past decade or so, we have seen a dramatic increase in the numbers of Americans, relying on their cell phones for their primary communications needs. In fact, it is estimated that 70 percent of the 9-1-1 calls made last year, were from cell phones. Due to innovations in broadband IP-based communications technologies, Americans expect to be able to send texts, photos, and videos to their family and friends over those mobile phones and other portable devices, and currently, many Americans believe that your networks can handle that type of traffic today.

In some emergency situations -- especially in circumstances where a call could further jeopardize someone's life and safety -- texting may be the only way to reach out for help. Certain well publicized national and international tragedies have confirmed that. During the Virginia Tech campus tragedy in 2007, students turned to text messages to spread news of the initial attack. They continued to update each other via text messaging as the horrifying attacks continued throughout the day.

The earthquake that devastated Haiti in January 2010, led to the development of a real world test bed for several new applications, such as interactive maps and texting platforms. In the aftermath of the quake, these tools were used on a large scale to promote a dialogue between citizens and relief workers. These applications were vital to urgent tasks, such as guiding search-and-rescue teams, locating missing persons, and delivering food and water to the populations that needed them the most.

During the more recent tragedy in Japan, several mobile wireless operators realized that so many of their country's citizens would be using text messages to communicate, that they set up disaster bulletin boards, to post text messages for others to read on the Web.

And last year, I had the opportunity to visit three West African nations for the first time. I had always heard how a visit to Mother Africa can have a profound impact on a person, and based on my experience, I would say that is an understatement. My visit with a Women's Oyster Harvesting Association, in The Gambia, left an impression that is particularly relevant here. The ladies told me a story of how one member drowned because she couldn't afford a cell phone and was unable to call out for help when the tide was high. Out of the 100 plus women in that room, that afternoon, only four had access to a mobile phone. This meeting was a powerful lesson to me, that mobile devices are not just luxuries, or status symbols, they are necessities for welfare and safety.

These national and international events and encounters, remind me that our emergency communications policies must adapt to the growing dependence of Americans on the advanced services that mobile networks offer. But if we want to migrate our 9-1-1 networks to a national IP-enabled emergency network, as many in this room know, we face a number of challenges. As an initial matter, the current 9-1-1 system was never designed to receive calls and data from these new and emerging technologies. Very few 9-1-1 call centers have the technical capability to

receive texts, photos, videos, and other data. Many 9-1-1 call centers do not even have access to broadband, which makes it difficult to receive large volumes of data.

Also, since Congress wants this to be a national network, we need NG9-1-1 rolled out in a uniform, systematic way. We cannot leave any communities behind. We cannot allow a digital divide to develop in emergency communications services. But we also have to be realistic, that not all communities have the same resources. Some will be able to migrate to NG9-1-1 sooner than others.

What we need in order to meet both of these challenges, is money. Absent appropriate action by, and funding for, States, Tribes, and local jurisdictions, there can be no effective 9-1-1 service. Both the National Broadband Plan, and the Commission's December 2010 Notice of Inquiry on the Framework for NG9-1-1 Deployment, admit that the transition to NG9-1-1, will be an evolutionary process, involving technical, economic, and institutional challenges.

But I am confident, that our Nation can rise to meet those challenges, and implement an effective national NG9-1-1 network. One of the reasons I am confident we can do this, is because NENA has shown great leadership in planning for this transition. In 2000, NENA explained that current 9-1-1 networks were, then, already being pushed to their technical limits. In 2001, NENA published the Future Path Plan. And in 2003, NENA began development activities, towards migrating 9-1-1 networks, to implement advanced communications. In fact, NENA's advocacy was largely responsible for the broad vision of the Notice of Inquiry that the Commission adopted last year.

Another reason I am confident of our successful transition to NG9-1-1, is that this Commission, under Chairman Genachowski's leadership, understands the importance of emergency communications, and the urgency of having all stakeholders work collaboratively to serve the public interest.

Earlier this month, the Commission released a Public Notice that instructs CSRIC – the advisory committee that assists the Commission with ensuring the security, reliability, and interoperability of communications networks – on its mission. At the top of the list, is the directive that CSRIC recommend best practices and actions the FCC can take that promote reliable E9-1-1, and Next Generation 9-1-1 service.

Brian Fontes, who Co-Chairs the CSRIC Working Group 4a has been doing as terrific a job in that role as he has as CEO of NENA. I am sure Brian will not hesitate to let us know, what other advice he has, so that we can efficiently promote the development of NG9-1-1 networks.

Conclusion

I would not feel right in saying farewell to you, if I did not commend all of those employees who work at PSAPs. You may not ride around in cars with flashing lights, and physically arrive at emergency scenes, but you are often the very first voice someone hears at a moment of extreme need, and you are vitally important in the quest to save lives. But for you, we would be unable to locate those in need, and get the proper help to them. Those who are rescued, those whose calls you take, may not be in the state of mind to even realize how critical a role you play in saving their lives and property. But for all of those people, too traumatized to say thank you, I say thank you. You are heroes, and we are all grateful.

I hope you enjoy your visit to DC and have a great conference!