

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
“EYE OF THE STORM: BROADCASTERS’ ROLE IN EMERGENCIES”
AT THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BROADCASTERS**

WASHINGTON, DC

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Thank you for the opportunity to be here. I’m honored to kick off this important discussion.

Today’s forum couldn’t be timelier. In recent weeks, we’ve seen broadcasters play a critical role in helping keep the American people safe. Broadcasters warned Californians to evacuate areas threatened by deadly wildfires and mudslides. And on the East Coast, New Englanders relied heavily on their local broadcasters to help get through the “bomb cyclone” winter storm that brought record snowfalls, ice, and hurricane-like wind speeds to some of the hardest-hit areas.

But this is nothing new. Broadcasting and public safety have been lifelong companions.

If you were to hold this same forum, a month, a year, or two years from now, you would have fresh examples of emergencies during which radio and TV broadcasters served as an invaluable lifeline.

I’ve met with broadcasters countless times since joining the FCC, and it’s almost become a standard part of my acknowledgments to thank you for your latest yeoman’s work during times of trouble.

The last time many of us were together was at the 2017 Radio Show in Austin, which was only days after Hurricane Harvey made landfall in Texas.

Just before the show, I visited KPRC-TV in Houston, and met the dedicated staff who kept Houstonians informed. We gathered in a conference room in which station staff actually slept during the storm—some because their own homes were flooded, others because there was nowhere else they wanted to be.

And during my Radio Show remarks, I could have filled my entire 20-minute speaking slot recounting other stories of broadcasters who went above and beyond after this historic storm. There was CBS Radio’s KIKK in Pasadena, Texas, a daytime-only station that petitioned the FCC for authority to provide emergency information around-the-clock (a petition we granted in less than an hour, I might add). And broadcasters served as more than just on-the-air first informers. There were stories like that of iHeartMedia, which leveraged its billboard assets to supply emergency information and worked directly with the Red Cross to coordinate post-storm relief efforts. And, of course, there was the now-famous Brandi Smith of KHOU, who helped save a truck driver on live television.

Just a couple of weeks later, I was in South Florida with Commissioner Clyburn to view the damage wrought by Hurricane Irma, and I heard similar stories. We did a joint interview with WIOD’s morning host Jimmy Cefalo (for those as old as me, yes—it’s *that* Jimmy Cefalo, the former Miami Dolphin) and WZTU’s Enrique Santos (for those not nearly as old as me, yes—it’s *that* Enrique Santos). They wanted to hear from us, but hearing from them about serving the community during Irma was far more compelling.

We can divine broadcasting’s value during emergencies not just from anecdotal evidence and our own personal experience, but also from the ratings.

Whenever emergencies hit, listenership and viewership go through the roof. And increasingly, we see this happen on new platforms. When Harvey landed in Texas, for example, local usage of the NextRadio app spiked 186%. Even in this age of high-speed connectivity, radio still has a unique connection with the American people that isn’t going away.

The bottom line is that whenever disasters strike, audiences will turn to broadcasters because they trust that broadcasters will help them.

The purpose of today's forum is to make sure broadcasters are best positioned to continue meeting this awesome responsibility. And you've teed up several questions for discussion. How can stations prepare facilities and staff for disasters? What can be learned from broadcasters' performance during these disasters? How can you balance broadcasters' commitment to inform the public versus the safety of employees? And along those lines, when should a reporter drop the mic to help a person in need?

I'm confident the experts assembled today will generate thoughtful and actionable recommendations for addressing these questions.

For my part, I'd like to briefly highlight some of the relevant issues we're working on at the FCC. Those issues include (1) resiliency; (2) alerting; and (3) Next Generation TV.

Let's start with resiliency. It's an iron law in the broadcast business: you can't provide critical public safety information to your community unless your facilities are operational.

Last month, we released a Public Notice seeking public input on many topics related to communications resiliency during the 2017 hurricane season. Among other things, we asked about the impact of the hurricanes on broadcast services. For example, were there any unique challenges faced by broadcasters? We also asked about the preparation for and response to the hurricanes by government and the private sector.

You're important stakeholders, so we want to hear from you. And we want to hear from you soon—comments are due on January 22. This input will inform the workshops we plan to hold this year on improving future response efforts.

Already, though, we know about several key challenges faced by communications providers in disaster areas.

First and foremost, there were challenges related to the loss of power—for example, not having backup power and needing fuel to keep a generator running. If your station is literally dark, your signal will be too. Infrastructure damage, such as downed towers, is another concern. I myself saw a massive downed tower at the top of a mountain in El Yunque National Forest in Puerto Rico—a critical vantage point for serving the island.

Not only do we know some of the challenges, we're working with those service providers we regulate and encouraging their efforts to meet these challenges.

Notably, broadcasters have had success working with state and local authorities to prepare for disasters. They've pre-arranged for priority access to fuel during disasters. And they've pre-planned to restore access to broadcast facilities that are located in disaster areas, including through debris removal.

Some have also benefitted from working with fellow broadcasters in local markets to help each other when it comes to things like backup power, technical restoration capacity, and broadcast feed redundancy.

In addition, during emergencies, we encourage broadcasters to file communications status reports in our voluntary Disaster Information Reporting System—or DIRS, as it's commonly known. This helps us figure out who's on and off the air. Broadcasters can also make requests for assistance via DIRS. Participation lets us know about the challenges broadcasters are facing—which in turn can help us find solutions.

I should also note that some of our recovery efforts, particularly in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, are still quite active. We continue to monitor and support communications service restoration where possible through our Hurricane Recovery Task Force. Just last week, the FCC came to

the aid of 20 hurricane-affected broadcasters in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands by granting their request to construct post-incentive auction facilities ahead of schedule. This will ensure that these affected broadcasters will only have to rebuild their broadcast facilities once, and enables them to access the TV Broadcaster Reimbursement Fund for some post-hurricane recovery costs. And perhaps most important, this relief will enable residents of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to access emergency communications and other valuable broadcast content sooner than they would have otherwise.

So that's resiliency. In addition, we want to work with broadcasters on alerting.

We appreciate broadcasters' participation in last September's nationwide test of the Emergency Alert System. It's important to ensure that America's emergency warning system remains robust and capable of alerting the public, and periodic testing enables us to identify and address any areas for improvement.

I'm also pleased to hear reports that broadcasters began using the newest weather-related alerts authorized by the FCC in 2016—for storm surges and extreme winds—during this past hurricane season. I encourage broadcasters to update their software to enable them to carry these alerts.

Of course, not all emergencies are weather-related. Last month, the Commission authorized a new alert option—called a “Blue Alert”—for the nation's emergency alerting system. Blue Alerts can be used by state and local authorities to warn the public when there is actionable information related to a law enforcement officer who's missing, who's seriously injured or killed in the line of duty, or is imminently and credibly threatened.

As with weather and AMBER Alerts, broadcasters can choose whether to transmit the Blue Alerts they receive over the EAS. But I know that you're deeply committed to your communities. So I hope you'll demonstrate the same strong commitment to carrying Blue Alerts as you do to carrying other EAS warnings. I encourage you to support these alerts as soon as possible.

And while I'm on the topic of alerts, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the false alert that was transmitted in Hawaii on Saturday. This incident highlights the need for our alerting system to work properly and for alerts to convey accurate information to the public. The FCC has already begun an investigation. We want to understand how this mistake occurred, why it took 38 minutes for the state of Hawaii to issue a correction alert, and what needs to be done to ensure that this does not happen again, in Hawaii or elsewhere. Indeed, FCC investigators are on the ground in Hawaii today gathering information.

As you know, broadcasters simply transmit emergency alerts to the public. They don't have any input into the content of those alerts. The substance of an alert is determined by the federal, state, or local government that originates the alert. So broadcasters, like the viewing or listening public, depend upon government to get it right. And in this instance, the Hawaiian government unfortunately didn't.

One last topic I'd like to briefly highlight is Next Generation TV, which many of you know as ATSC 3.0. Last November, the FCC authorized the rollout of this next-generation broadcast television standard on a voluntary, market-driven basis. This could enable a substantially improved, free, over-the-air television broadcast service, and fiercer competition in the video marketplace. But most relevant to today's discussion, Next Gen TV provides a new and improved method to provide consumers with vital information during emergencies.

For instance, today you only receive emergency alerts via broadcast television if your receiver is turned on. But ATSC 3.0 has the capability to send a signal that will wake up sleeping devices so that all consumers will be warned of imminent emergencies even if their device is turned off. And those warnings can be sent in multiple languages. Another feature of ATSC 3.0 is the ability to target the warnings and relevant information to particular areas. If there is an emergency that only affects part of a metropolitan area, such as a tornado, the warning can be sent only to those affected spots. The FCC

decided to encourage this kind of innovation because we don't think we should hold back the development of new services and applications that can benefit consumers. And I hope that broadcasters too won't hold back in taking advantage of this opportunity to innovate.

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With that, I'd like to thank you once more for your public service. Here's hoping you have a productive conference today. And do remember that the FCC and broadcasters will continue working effectively as partners to help keep the American people safe in times of emergency.