

**REMARKS OF
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Good afternoon. Thank you to the Hispanic Radio Conference for having me join you here in Miami.

Today is March 14th. I say that not to get credit for knowing the calendar, but because in a few short weeks, hurricane season will begin. You see, lately I've been thinking about, talking about, and working on our response to emergencies and natural disasters.

As you know, broadcasters have always stood on the front lines when the unthinkable occurs. From the earliest days of the iconic beeps of the Emergency Broadcast System, broadcasters have been an essential part of our public safety response. Today, those systems have evolved into the Emergency Alert System, with a mix of nationwide, state, and local capabilities. Moreover, they now come together with Wireless Emergency Alerts through the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Let's be honest. This system is not simple—and the false emergency alert in Hawaii earlier this year demonstrated that we have serious work to do. But in emergencies, one thing is clear: radio responds.

I saw it last week first hand in Puerto Rico—and it's what I want to spend the bulk of my time talking about to you today.

I've spent a lot of time in Puerto Rico in the past. But this trip was different. I was there to learn about its recovery from the destruction of Hurricane Maria. Nearly six months has passed since that storm wreaked havoc on the island. I know you remember it—because what happened was stunning. Communities were flooded with over 30 inches of rain. Warm Caribbean breezes were replaced by winds of 155 miles an hour. The impact was devastating.

Today, the damage from Hurricane Maria is still out in the open, for all to see. Traffic lights don't work. Streets are unexpectedly dark at night. Tarps cover buildings. Businesses are closed. Construction gates still surround stray blocks of concrete and rebar. There are gashes in infrastructure and signs missing along the roads that need no explanation for their absence. They are the marks of a storm that don't go away, marks that remind its residents of the awful harm that wind and rain can do to a community, its economy, and its way of life.

As of last month, official statistics suggest 400,000 residents of Puerto Rico still don't have electricity. But in my travels, many people told me they thought the true number was even higher. That means American citizens are still living without necessities like health care, hot

meals, and basic communications. So not only has this prolonged power outage cut into the economic security of the island, it has put people's lives at risk.

That's not easy to see in person—or even recount to you here and now. So now let me offer the good news. Because I saw that, too. I saw fierce resiliency in the face of these difficulties. I saw hope in the prospect for rebuilding. I saw pride in the island and its Hispanic heritage. I also saw just what radio stations on the island did—and I think their stories need to be told.

So let me start with WKAQ. It's a radio station in San Juan that broadcasts on 580 kHz with a Spanish-language talk radio format. Its studios are in Guaynabo in modern building with cool marble everywhere—and lots of windows. In fact, the top of the building is a big expanse of circular glass. So when Hurricane Maria first started to roar, WKAQ hunkered down. They were determined to ride out the storm and offer the news and information they knew their listeners needed. But when the winds really arrived, the glass top of the building shattered. The rain came down, and turned the stairs into a virtual waterfall. The office seemed to explode. Ruben Sanchez was on the air during a live interview with Governor Ricardo Rossello when this happened. He interrupted the back-and-forth with the island's highest-level official to announce that the studio was now vulnerable but he assured his listeners they would do what they could to stay on air.

To do so, they hatched a plan to relocate to the transmitter nearby. But when they arrived at the squat cement building where their facilities sat, it was surrounded by water. The creek nearby had risen several feet and had flooded the area. The building stood a virtual island in the middle of a toxic pool of water. That didn't stop WKAQ. They secured a truck with monster tires and drove right in. Then they set up a studio in a small room with an old linoleum floor and a cooling system—a rickety fan. They dove back in, doing what radio does best—providing essential content for the community they serve. From this crude studio they broadcast out conversations with the Governor, mayors, and other officials with news to spread about the storm.

But they didn't stop there. You see, you didn't need to be an official in a leadership role to get the makeshift studio's time and attention. Because when word got out they were still broadcasting, they fielded calls from Florida, New York, Illinois, and Texas and used their signal to assist those on the mainland with locating their loved ones in Puerto Rico after the storm.

WAPA is another radio station I visited in Puerto Rico. It broadcasts at 680 kHz in San Juan. It was the only broadcaster to remain on the air throughout Hurricane Maria. They are a small family-owned operation, but they did big things to keep the island informed throughout the storm. In fact, they did more than keep their listeners informed. They saved lives.

When the rains started, the employees moved in to the station to weather the storm determined to use their broadcasting capability to help in any way they could. With their generators going, public officials dropped by and used the station signal to reach out to their constituents. With their phones not working, residents queued up at the station, seeking information about the safety of their friends, neighbors, and coworkers. And WAPA took it all

in—and read it on air. In fact, the station still has the cardboard boxes where they kept the notes written on stray scraps of paper from anyone and everyone who stopped by the station seeking help and assistance.

The stories from those visits are unbelievable. A cardiac surgeon visited the station seeking the mother of a newborn in urgent need of heart surgery in order to authorize placing the infant on a flight for medical evacuees. As a result of his on-air plea, relief workers were able to track her down. The station also got the word out to help a home for the elderly that had run out of diesel for its generator. Listeners responded with fuel, food, and water. A kidney patient got a ride to a dialysis center, medicine was delivered to those in need, and calls were taken that helped first responders rescue those trapped on the roofs of their homes, threatened by rough and rising water.

One of the most striking things about this station's story, however, was not just that they opened their doors to the community, but that they opened their door to competitors. They invited in journalists and on-air personalities from other stations to broadcast and help get the word out over WAPA's airwaves. As every broadcaster I visited with on the island told me, they were no longer competing for listeners, they were a team with one goal—staying on the air—and serving the community. I don't think you'll find a better demonstration of radio's commitment to the public interest than that.

I think it's important to tell these stories. Because when we read about Puerto Rico, the news is rough. The recovery will be long. But the heroism I saw was amazing. And we need to remember that when the unthinkable occurs, we turn to radio. It's a public safety force. It keeps us connected when too many of our other connections fail. I think it's essential for the Federal Communications Commission to keep this in mind with everything we do.

I'm pleased to be able to share these stories with you today. But I think the FCC needs to do more than have me offer my anecdotes. We owe Puerto Rico and other communities hard hit by last year's hurricanes what the agency has always produced—a basic assessment of the consequences for communications. That can be done with field hearings and reports—just like what was done following Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy. While we have a proposal before us to support the recovery of wired and wireless communications, the FCC has not completed a full public study of what went right and what went wrong. I think we should—before hurricane season is here. I think we could learn a thing or two from the stations who weathered this storm.

When we study what happened, I think we may also learn something about the power of diverse ownership. We all know that the way we consume media has changed. The daily newspaper no longer has a monopoly on morning news and the evening broadcast is no longer the only place to get our facts at the end of the day. We get our news, when we want it and where we want it—on any device handy.

In many ways, this change is exciting. But as you know, it is also challenging. The economic models that sustained news and entertainment have been transformed by digitization.

There's a lot of change—for radio and everything else. But I think there are some values in our media policy that have stood the test of time we should not abandon. For decades, FCC had rules designed to promote media diversity, localism, and competition. Those values may not be especially trendy, but I think they are solid. They support journalism and jobs. They play a key role advancing the mix of facts we all need to make decisions about our lives, our communities, and our country.

I am sad to say the agency has been on a tear, dismantling those values instead of engaging in thoughtful reform. Over my objection, it is giving the green light for more consolidation and less diversity of ownership.

Today, only five percent of AM radio stations and four percent of FM radio stations are owned by Hispanics or Latinos. Let's acknowledge those numbers are too small. They do not fully reflect the diversity of our country.

Let's be mindful of that—and open to ideas to address it thoughtfully. Bringing back the minority tax certificate program comes immediately to mind. So does paying attention to discrimination in advertising sales.

In 2007, the FCC unanimously adopted rules banning broadcasters from accepting advertising contracts with “no urban/no Spanish” dictates. These discriminatory contracts allow advertisers and their agencies to bypass stations. This is redlining and it compounds the difficulty of stations competing for scarce dollars in a crowded media market. These clauses are simply not right.

The FCC needs to use its authority to continue to ensure that these dictates disappear. It does this now by requiring stations to certify that their advertising sales contracts contain nondiscrimination clauses and do not discriminate based on race or ethnicity. These certifications take place at the renewal of every broadcast license.

This is good. But to end this practice we need a commitment beyond broadcasters. So I'm pleased to report that last month the American Association of Advertising Agencies released a Fair Play charter. It asks its members to recommit to ending the redlining practices that discriminated against minority media outlets. Stay tuned, because this matters.

I'll end my remarks here. Let me thank you for listening. Let me thank you also for what you do. Radio is remarkable. We live in a world with so many platforms, so many ways to listen, so many ways to consume information and entertainment. But there is still something special about a voice in the air. There is still something extraordinary about how a single signal can reach out and connect with so many of us. I know. I saw it clearly in Puerto Rico—and I know that power resides in the work you do every day.

Thank you.