

Media Contact:

Michael Sweeney, (202) 418-1087

Michael.Sweeney@fcc.gov

For Immediate Release

COMMISSIONER SIMINGTON UNDERSCORES NEED FOR AM RESILIENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C., February 27, 2023—Today, Commissioner Simington echoed the sentiments expressed by former FEMA leaders in their letter to the Secretary Buttigieg of the Department of Transportation regarding AM radio’s continued importance for public safety. He said:

“I applaud the statement by FEMA leaders on the importance of AM radio for disaster response. As the FCC shares authority with FEMA for many aspects of our national emergency alerting systems, I underscore and affirm their concerns in the strongest possible terms. The issue of the continued inclusion of AM radios in electric vehicles deserves urgent attention.

“We know that auto manufacturers seek to produce new electric vehicles in a cost-effective manner. I have been pleased to support technological modernization whenever reasonable, from improved receivers to improved wireless device security, each of which, I think, improves spectral efficiency, and, ultimately, marginal efficiency. But we cannot count beans at the expense of farming them. As adoption of electric vehicles increases, we must not leave behind those in rural areas who depend upon radio for their news and alerts. According to the National Association of Farm Broadcasters, most agricultural radio listeners—themselves comprising most farmers—tune in to the AM band. Average listening time reaches over an hour per day, five days per week.

“I grew up in rural Saskatchewan—a connectivity desert (or, perhaps, a connectivity tundra). Then, as now, radio and the trades were essential for staying connected. Though it is not accurate to say that nothing has changed, not enough has changed to obviate the need for radio. The situation is similar in the United States.

“While many in rural communities depend upon AM radio for information about emergencies, particularly alerts about weather, AM radio is important for more than just emergency information and alerting. AM radio informs and entertains tens of millions of listeners. Broadcasters spend decades developing relationships with the local communities that they serve, and the trust engendered by those relationships pays dividends back through community-informed reporting. And, just like emergency alerting, an informed and engaged citizenry serves as an essential foundation for public safety.

“No one can doubt the public-spiritedness of the signatories to the open letter, who have lifetimes' worth of public service between them. They have done their part to raise the significance of this issue. The question now is: what shall the rest of us do?”

“I believe that the FCC should make clear the vital importance of AM radio. We should, further, be good stewards of the AM radio band. That includes protecting AM radio as a public resource by safeguarding reception of AM radio from arrogation by incidental and unintentional radiation.

“The public safety community and the American public rely on AM radio. Auto manufacturers now, and increasingly in the future will, rely on spectrum. Care should be taken to weigh the velocity of innovations against the stability of institutions. The Commission can, and must, play a role in striking that balance.

“I once again applaud the letter and offer my wholehearted agreement and support.”

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