STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN JULIUS GENACHOWSKI

Re: Utilizing Rapidly Deployable Aerial Communications Architecture in Response to an Emergency (PS Docket No. 11-15)

This item is one of several we have considered at the Commission, including another later today, that seem like science fiction – but antennas in the sky are fact, not fiction.

When disaster strikes, our ground-based communications infrastructure can of course be damaged. And as reliant as we have become on communications for public safety and the business of life, this can severely complicate even the best-prepared emergency response efforts.

Deployable Aerial Communications Architecture has the ability to temporarily restore critical communications – including emergency response and 911 calling. And it can potentially restore communications quickly, in the first hours after a disaster strikes.

The idea, though technologically complex, is relatively straightforward: sending self-powered antennas into the sky, that can provide floating 3G, LTE, or Wi-Fi service. We know this technology can work. It is already being used by the U.S. military.

This technology would have been remarkably useful after Hurricane Katrina, for example, when thirty-eight 911 call centers became inoperable and more than 3 million customers lost telephone service.

We're launching this proceeding to accelerate the availability and use of this technology for domestic emergency services. Building on the work of our Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, we expect this Notice of Inquiry will help us answer a number of outstanding questions.

For example, how to protect terrestrial networks from harmful interference. And what is the most efficient way to activate this technology during an emergency.

Public safety remains a top agency priority, and there's been much progress on harnessing advanced communications technology to empower first responders and save lives – including the accelerated launch of the new system that allows authorities to send targeted alerts to peoples' mobile devices during an emergency, important steps toward next-generation 911, and the funding and legislative adoption of a framework to stand up a nationwide interoperable mobile broadband public safety network.

Of course, realizing the potential of this technology will be a joint effort. I want to acknowledge the work of our industry and government partners. Particularly, thank you to Brian Steckler of the HFN Center for joining us today. Brian Conner, who is part of the Unmanned Aircraft Group at the FAA, is also here, and thank you for your work.

Finally, thank you to my fellow Commissioners and the staff of the Public Safety Bureau for their work on this item.