

REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
WORKSHOP TO IDENTIFY CRITICAL INFORMATION NEEDS TO IMPROVE
COMMUNICATIONS DURING DISASTERS

WASHINGTON, DC

APRIL 13, 2018

Good morning, and welcome to the FCC. Thank you for giving up your Friday to participate in today's workshop.

Last year's hurricane season was one of the most devastating in U.S. history. Hundreds of thousands of innocent Americans caught in the path of these storms suffered terrible losses. Although the storms have passed, rebuilding continues. Many communities are still struggling to gain a semblance of normality—hoping to rebuild homes, schools, hospitals, and businesses, all as they look over their shoulders, bracing for this year's hurricane season.

Over the past eight months, I've traveled throughout communities devastated by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria. Just last month, I was in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In Puerto Rico, I visited Utuado with Sandra Torres, the head of the Telecommunications Regulatory Board, and Commissioner Alexandra Fernandez—each of whom is here this morning. Together, we heard firsthand the nightmare of having communications cut off in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, just at the moment when getting information and asking for help was of paramount importance. The people of Utuado stepped up and cleared the roads to get the repair trucks in so they could once again be connected with the rest of the world.

Stories from places like Utuado illustrate why today's workshop is so important. The ability to communicate information is critical during emergencies—it's what helps us warn communities, dispatch assistance, and more. Today's workshop will look at how first responders from all levels of government can better coordinate and use emergency information to help all Americans in times of disaster. We hope you'll help us understand better how information-sharing during natural disasters and other emergencies could improve emergency response.

As you're already aware, we released a Public Notice in December asking for your input on how the FCC performed during the 2017 Hurricane Season. We received some very thought-provoking and helpful insights. During this workshop, we hope to have a candid discussion about what information the Commission could or should provide to help improve disaster response and recovery efforts. Simply put, there's no better way for us to understand your needs than to directly ask you.

We've got a lot of ground to cover, so I'm going to yield the floor to the public safety experts. But before I do, I'd like to thank our outstanding team in our Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, not just for organizing today's forum but for the superb job they've done to help keep Americans connected and safe.

And special thanks to you, our guests, for making our communities safer. I'm genuinely touched by the heroism exhibited by our emergency professionals and first responders, and by the indomitable spirit of residents in affected communities in times of crisis.

Regardless of how bad or difficult things get, one thing's for sure: Americans come together when it's needed most. I feel it's equally important that the FCC do everything within its power to aid our emergency professionals and to keep our communities safe. This workshop is just the latest step the Commission is taking in to achieve that goal.