

REMARKS: C. PATRICK ROBERTS, PRESIDENT
FLORIDA ASSOCIATION OF BROADCASTERS

**Federal Communications Commission:
Hurricane Katrina Independent Panel**

**March 7, 2006
Jackson, Mississippi**

Good morning Madame Chairman and Members of the Panel.

I am C. Patrick Roberts, President of the Florida Association of Broadcasters. I also serve as the Florida Chairman of the Federal Communication Commission State Emergency Communication Committee.

Thank you for allowing me to share with you today my perspective on hurricane warnings and preparedness.

Let me begin by briefly sharing some of my experiences in the field of emergency management.

For the past 17 years, I have served on Florida's State Emergency Response Team. Broadcasters are considered First Responders in Florida.

Back in 1992 I was at our Emergency Operations Center three days before Hurricane Andrew hit our state and then I arrived in Homestead with Governor Chiles in the afternoon after landfall. I

have been to all the Florida Hurricanes since Andrew and last year I was in Biloxi the day after Katrina.

Hurricane Andrew taught Florida that local and state government needed to be better prepared to respond to these types of disasters. Andrew also taught us the preparedness was the responsibility of both the public and private sectors. As a result, for the past 13 years, Florida has invested in training people, utilizing the latest technology, and with the partnership with the Florida Association of Broadcasters implementing public disaster preparedness education programs.

Today Florida Broadcasters are considered First Responders, local radio and television are the life line to the residents of the local communities. Those efforts have not been limited solely to hurricanes. Florida has taken an ALL HAZARDS approach to preparedness and response that includes hurricanes, wildfires, flooding, tornadoes and also terrorism threats.

Without the emphasis on preparedness and response that Florida has had over the past 13 years our state and local governments and our residents would not have gotten through the numerous hurricanes that have hit our state during the past 2 years. We truly play like we practice.

I think many of the lessons learned in Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas are valuable and applicable to the United States as a whole and I would like to take a few moments to share some of those with the Panel.

First, America MUST have a more cohesive and comprehensive program among federal, state and local governments and our citizens to prepare for natural disasters and terrorism.

The public expects a unified command from city hall to the state house and to the White House.

That means more training and exercises, and utilizing the latest training technologies. It also means we need our states and counties to have state-of-the-art Emergency Operations Centers.

We need a unified national Emergency Alert System for immediate public warning that allows the President or governors the ability to activate a county, a state, multi-state region or the nation.

Currently, the EAS system is most often used for AMBER Alerts to help communities find missing children.

I highly recommend a federally funded, state-based EAS system in a partnership between the FCC, NOAA and Homeland Security.

Today, the only way the President can speak to the nation through EAS is by utilizing the National Weather Service.

The Florida Association of Broadcasters in partnership with the Florida Division of Emergency Management has developed a comprehensive Hurricane Preparedness Campaign. This has

helped our residents be prepared when Hurricanes approach Florida. We produce and air public service announcements for both Television and Radio in both English and Spanish and they are closed captioned for television.

Broadcasters provide the public education at the start of every Hurricane Season and we add new messages based on our experiences. A few examples are:

- Evacuation Zones
- Special Needs
- Prescription Drugs
- Pets

During an actual hurricane, Broadcasters provide valuable information to the local residents of the impacted area. In most cases, it's the radio stations, with the help of the local television news operations that are able to get the information out.

Because of their role during disasters, broadcasters also need to have priority status when it comes to fuel. Over the past few years there have been a number of instances where radio and television stations were close to going off the air because they were running out of fuel for their generators. In Florida, local television and radio stations are on the priority fuel list after health care and public safety. Local, State and Federal Emergency Management plans need to include Broadcast stations in their fuel priority plans.

During 2004, for the first time we activated EAS in Florida before two of the hurricanes made landfall. That led me this year to share our experience with stations in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana and let them know what they needed to do to help their local citizens. It is my understanding EAS was activated by the National Weather Service during Katrina.

In 2004, the Clear Channel radio station in Punta Gorda lost over half its buildings but stayed on the air throughout the storm. Last September, as a result of Hurricane Katrina, WLOX-TV in Biloxi, lost a large part of its building but never went off the air. They never stopped broadcasting vital news bulletins to its community. Several local Southern Mississippi radio stations simulcast WLOX-TV programs – these are broadcasters working together to serve their communities. Broadcasters – along with the police, firefighters, emergency managers, public safety officials, electric utility and phone providers are on the front lines as the nation's First Responders.

Local Broadcasters are proud of their role serving their communities and are vigilant in alerting and warning people – especially to get them out of harms way.

I have enclosed a more detailed report that I provided the U. S. Senate Commerce Committee last fall for your review.

I am honored to answer any questions the Panel may have at this time.