Concluding Remarks

Commissioner Timothy A. Simon

Wow! What a day!

I cannot think of a day since I’ve joined this Commission where I learned as much key information about the functioning of communications infrastructure in emergencies!

I think this is a good time to point out that Governor Schwarzenegger recently took action to make $2 million available to 13 counties to procure notification systems. As we have seen today, these notifications can play a critical role in emergencies. Also, as we have learned from Pamela Payton this morning, for some communities, such as colleges, where students no longer use landlines, only notification systems will permit communications in emergencies. It struck me that the University of San Diego has developed a model system. It was great to hear about it.

Second, the presentations we got from Ron Lane, Maribel Marin, and John Ohanian make clear that in emergencies simply getting the word out is not enough. Many of those who receive notification will need to talk to a person to double check and verify the alert. Today, 211 provides this service, and where 211 is absent, that service is not provided. We need to do what we can to ensure that this service is available everywhere. Moreover, this private public partnership is exactly the type that the governor has applauded in his latest state of the state address. The Public Utilities Commission should take a lead in this area.

Finally, there is also good news today. Telecommunications networks continued to operate at high levels. Few calls were blocked, and callers could get through, if not immediately, fairly quickly. In addition, modern networks, with self-healing loops, function well in emergencies. We still need to work to ensure that the public realizes the importance of having an old fashioned phone that does not require commercial power to operate and to ensure that as more notification systems are deployed that the resulting increases in traffic do not cause networks to crash, as many websites crashed at the start of this emergency.

I am also sure that I have probably failed to mention important lessons that I will remember on the plane tonight. Thankfully, we have the whole session videotaped and I will review it carefully.

Thanks to all who have participated. Thanks to Joe Camicia and telecommunications and public advisor staff who have worked so diligently on this workshop. Finally, thanks especially to those who spoke on our panels for doing such a first-rate job.