

From the FCC

last word

Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate talks about the importance of payphones in America today



Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) sent a videotaped message to independent payphone providers who attended APCC's 2006 Conference & Expo. Among the highlights of her talk:

"In a world where it seems like almost everyone has a cell phone — and indeed, where 6 percent of households only use cell phones — it's easy to forget that payphones are still an important part of many people's lives. In fact, 8.7 million American households still have no phone service at all. A payphone may be some people's only lifeline to communicate with others.

"In particular, payphones are a critical part of homeland security. They are there for those times that we can't anticipate, when our landlines and our cell phones aren't available. And so as we plan for the possibility of another disaster — whether a terrorist attack, a hurricane or pandemic flu — we should not forget to consider payphones as part of our response. ...

"On that note, I want to take a minute to emphasize something that Chairman [Kevin] Martin has recognized since coming to the FCC and that is the vital role of the FCC in homeland security. Hurricane Katrina was just another reminder that we live in an unpredictable world. Our ability to respond quickly and efficiently to a crisis depends on our ability to communicate with one another. In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the FCC worked round the clock to make sure that communications providers had the ability to get telephones and

radios working again. It was a tremendous effort, and ... the chairman has since committed to creating an entirely new Homeland Security Bureau at the FCC devoted to these issues.

"I fully support Chairman Martin's efforts in this regard. The faster you can get your phone lines back in action, the faster people can call for help or get in touch with their loved ones. ...The FCC needs to be prepared to act quickly to give you the freedom you need to restore services in hard-hit areas. Chairman Martin has put together an independent panel to review the Katrina response and recommend ways to build upon and improve the FCC's response to such disasters. ...

"Payphones are also an important part of our efforts to provide universal service. As chairman of the joint board, I will be deeply involved in discussions of the issues surrounding the Universal Service Fund. ...I know that many of you are concerned about changes to the fund that might increase your operating costs. I also know many of you are also worried about the increasing demand on the fund and its sustainability.

"I hope each of you will help us to consider these issues from the most important perspective of all — the perspective of consumers. ...We shouldn't see reform, or change, as a threat to the status quo, but as an incentive to work together to tap the potential of our collective resources to provide access to communication services and solutions for all Americans." ■